KNIGHT

The Warrior
and World *of*
Chivalry

ROBERT JONES

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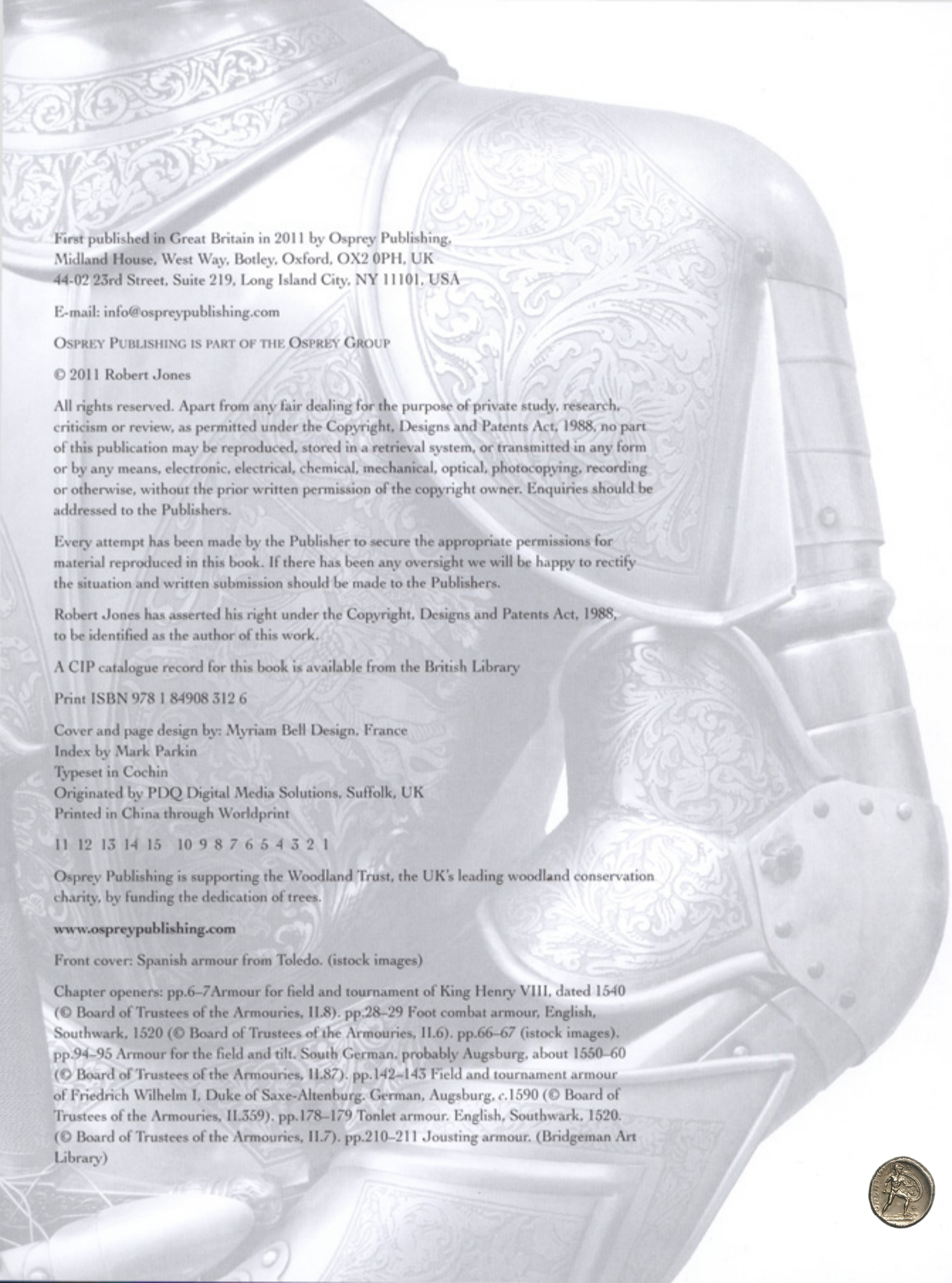

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Front cover: Spanish armour from Toledo. (istock images)

Chapter openers: pp.6–7Armour for field and tournament of King Henry VIII, dated 1540 (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.8). pp.28–29 Foot combat armour, English, Southwark, 1520 (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.6). pp.66–67 (istock images). pp.94–95 Armour for the field and tilt. South German, probably Augsburg, about 1550–60 (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.87). pp.142–143 Field and tournament armour of Friedrich Wilhelm I, Duke of Saxe-Altenburg. German, Augsburg, *c*.1590 (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.359). pp.178–179 Tonlet armour. English, Southwark, 1520. (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.7). pp.210–211 Jousting armour. (Bridgeman Art Library)

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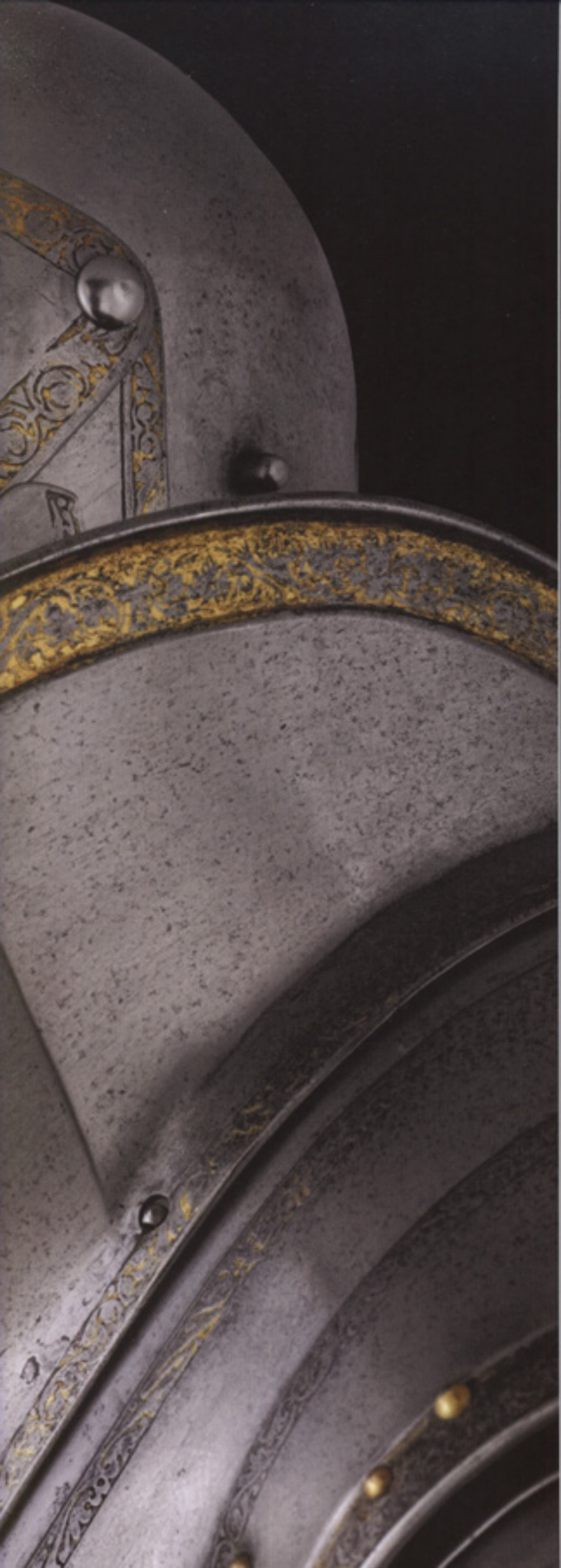


INTRODUCTION

THERE CAN BE NO WARRIOR QUITE SO ICONIC AND IMMEDIATELY recognizable as the medieval knight. More than any other he remains a part of contemporary culture. Not only does he ride his charger, resplendent in his shining armour and colourful heraldry, through novels and movies, but his armour still decorates museums, castles and stately homes, and his image in brass or stone adorns our churches. Every summer crowds gather to watch the sight of costumed interpreters bringing him back to life in jousting matches and re-enactments.

But this image of the knight – the mounted warrior armoured head to toe, bedecked with brightly painted heraldry and mounted on a great charger – is only a snapshot of what the real knight was. The full picture is much more complex. His outward appearance changed over the 500 years of his dominance, as armourers responded to the developments in weapons technology and took advantage of the changes in metallurgy and smithing techniques. The figure he cut in the 11th century – clad in unadorned mail with a nasal helm on his head – was vastly different from that of the 14th, where the mixture of plate and mail was hidden beneath a flowing surcoat and his face was covered by a full helm or the beaked visor of the more lightweight *bascinet*; which was as different again from the way he looked as his time on the battlefield came to an end in the 16th century – massively armoured in full plate under a sleeved tabard, with his visored helmet topped with plumes of ostrich feathers.

Nor did knights charge hell-for-leather into combat. Whilst the evidence for the tactics used on the battlefield can be frustratingly vague it is clear that, when executed correctly, charges were carefully timed and structured using small-unit tactics to maximize their impact and allow for reforming and the use of reserves. The importance of being *ordinate* – in good order – and the dangers of being *inordinate* are regular themes in battle narratives. Knightly commanders could be rash and arrogant, it is true, but they could equally be cunning and careful.

The knight's skill was not limited to mounted combat and the knight was as effective a warrior on foot as he was on horseback. The Anglo-Norman knights of the 12th century and the English men-at-arms of the 14th and 15th fought their pitched battles on foot more often than they did on horseback, and other nations' warriors might do the same. Contrary to the traditional view, a knight knocked out of the saddle did not necessarily become as helpless as a turtle on its back, although in certain circumstances he might be at a disadvantage. The armour he wore was purpose built and represented the finest in medieval engineering and craftsmanship. The knight had to be fit, to be sure, but his armour by no means rendered him immobile. The knight was the complete warrior of the middle ages.

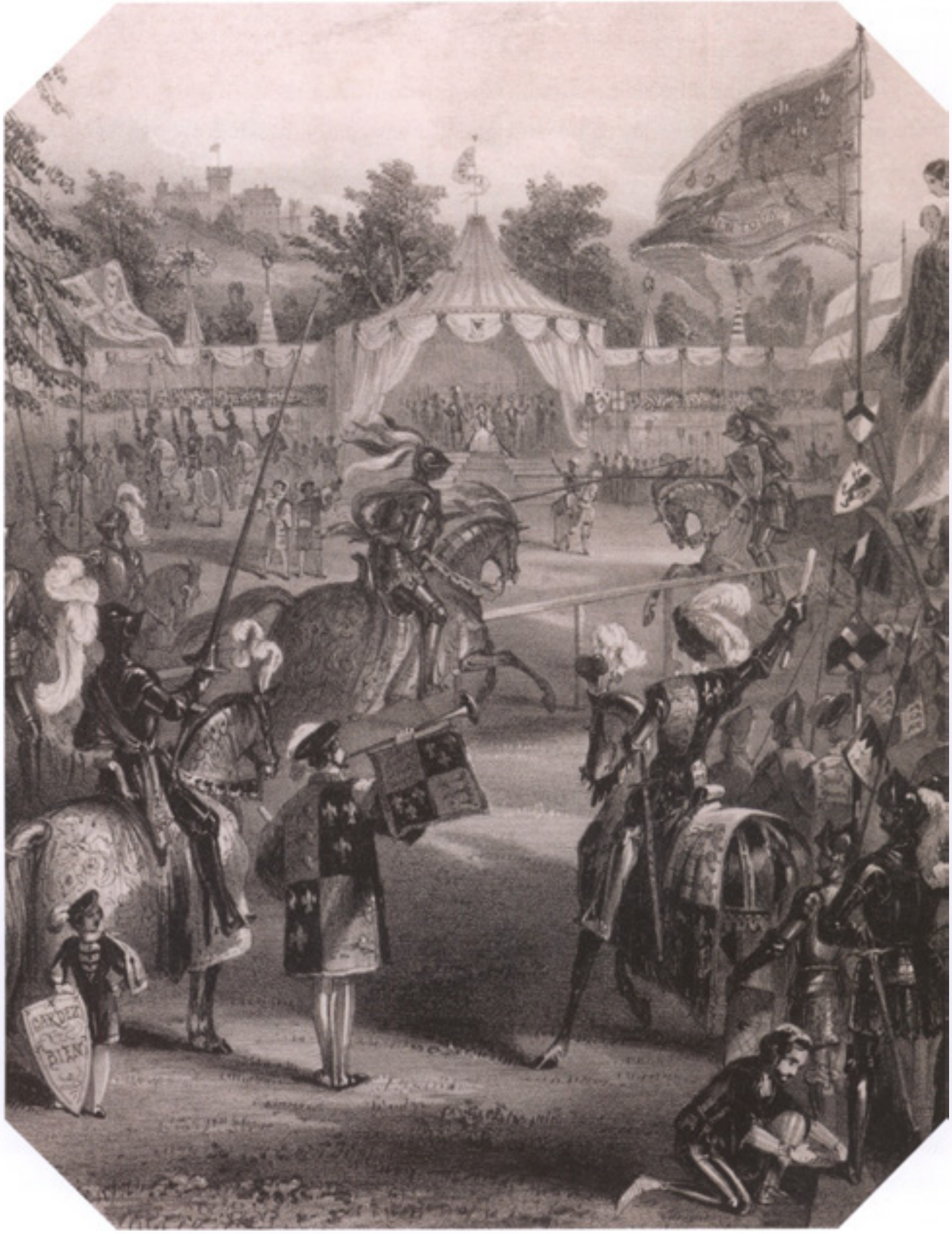
Not surprisingly, the popular image of the knight is an almost wholly martial one, but the knight was far more than just a warrior. The knight was a part of a martial elite largely because he and his companions formed the social and political elite too. This gave him not only the finances and resources to equip himself with the armour, weapons and mounts that made him so formidable, but also the leisure to be able to train and hone his skills in the hunt and on the battlefield. It also gave him a sense of his own superiority; the arrogance of the knight could lead him to achieve tremendous things but also to make tremendous errors.

Understanding the knight's place in society and politics is a more difficult proposition than understanding his military function, but it is no less important. Not only could he be a landowner administering his own estates, he might also serve as a royal officer, acting as juror or judge or a commissioner performing administrative tasks that seem far removed from his martial background. Just as his martial appearance evolved so too did his social status. In the 11th century knights were little more than armed servants, their status low. By the 12th century they had risen up the ranks and every lord was a knight (even if every knight was not a lord). By the end of the 13th century the ordinary knight was being called upon to advise monarchs in parliaments. By the 14th century the distinction of the knightly class was already being eroded as lesser men – the esquires and 'gentry' – began to live, serve and behave as the knight did. By the 16th century these lesser men were being knighted, whilst others achieved the same status by service within royal households that now prized courtliness and political acumen over martial ability.

The knight had a rich and vibrant culture. He was both literate and intellectual. Many knights were writers, and have left us with tales of great deeds or chronicles of the events they had witnessed and people they knew. Others produced legal and religious discourses which show a contemplative and sensitive nature that belies the brutality of their vocation. Their money was spent on fine clothing, music and gardens as much as on fine arms, armour and horses. Of course there was a link between their cultural tastes and martial background. Many of the tales that they listened to were about the deeds of mythical heroes and champions performing great deeds of valour in battle. But these characters were lovers as well as fighters. The stories are often as much about the ladies they loved as about the battles they fought. They can have a religious element too. The Church increasingly sought to redirect and limit the violence and vanity of the warrior by shaping knightly culture in an image more pleasing to itself.

A KNIGHT BY ANY OTHER NAME

The knight, therefore, performed a wide variety of functions and roles. But not all knights performed all functions, and some roles were also performed by those who cannot otherwise be considered knights. As a result how we define a knight is not



The lists at the Eglinton Tournament, 1839. 'I am aware that it was a very humble imitation of the scenes which my imagination had portrayed, but I have, at least, done something towards the revival of chivalry,' said the 13th Earl of Eglinton, who organized this piece of romantic theatre that typifies the modern romantic image of knighthood. (Mary Evans Picture Library) as straightforward as it might first appear. A strict social definition is all very well: a knight can be considered a knight because he is accorded and uses the title, having been accepted by other knights into their closed elite, his entry being marked by a ritual known as 'dubbing', 'belting' or simply 'knighting'. However there is a great gulf in the social and economic position of the kings, princes and nobles and their armed retainers and the German *ministeriales*: knights who in many ways shared the status of serfs.

A military definition based upon the knights' battlefield role is equally problematic because that role could be so varied and was certainly not limited to what the modern commentator would consider to be the role of 'heavy cavalry'. Furthermore, some of those who served in full armour and on horseback would not have been recognized in social terms as knights, but were instead squires, sergeants and 'gentry', serving alongside the knight proper, when all were generally referred to by the catch-all term 'man-at-arms'. Any attempt to isolate the non-knightly component from a discussion of the role of the man-at-arms in battle would be impossible, not least because they are often as indistinguishable in our narrative sources as they almost certainly were on the battlefield itself.

A third definition might be culturally based. No matter where or what prince they served, no matter what their precise social status, no matter whether they performed that service on foot or horseback, these men were drawn together by a shared understanding of what it was they did, and the values that encompassed their station: chivalry. Of course not every knight had the same concept of what was chivalrous and what was not. The construct was no less nebulous and hard to pin down in the middle ages than it is today. Furthermore the sources regularly talk about knights who were not chivalrous, usually to condemn their behaviour. They remain, however, knights: bad knights, wicked knights, but knights none the less.

With all of these caveats then, we shall, for the purposes of this book, consider that the knights were that group of men who formed a social elite as a result of their ability to fight from horseback in full armour (whether or not they chose to do so on the field itself), sharing a common set of values: chivalry. Of necessity this will mean that the strict social definition of the knight will be fudged somewhat and that the esquires and gentry who would lie outside it will be included by dint of their service as heavy cavalry and their shared cultural background. Equally the terms 'knight', 'man-at-arms' and sometimes the even less specific but no less charged 'warrior' will be used fairly freely, alongside the Latin term *miles* (the plural of which is *milites*) and the French *chevalier* and *gendarme*.

THE AGE OF THE MEDIEVAL KNIGHT

This book will look at the world of the knight over almost a thousand years; seeking his origins in the declining years of the Roman Empire and the early medieval seventh to tenth centuries, and charting his rise to prominence in the so-called high middle ages that lie approximately between 1000 and 1400. It will try to understand something of the decline in knighthood (in England at least) towards the end of this period and the way it was reinvigorated by Edward III's military successes in his campaigns against the Scots and French, and his love of chivalric culture and the spectacle of tournaments and pageants. In the late middle ages, from the middle of the 15th century, the knight's dominance of the battlefield came increasingly under attack, and the book will look at the factors that led to his apparent disappearance from the battlefield in the 16th century.

In describing the world of the medieval knight, alongside surviving arms and armour, and his image in effigy, brass and illuminated manuscript, a wide range of written sources are used. The numerous chronicles written by monks like the 12th-century Anglo-Norman Orderic Vitalis, born in Shropshire but composing his *Ecclesiastical History* in the Norman monastery of St Evroult-en-Ouche, or secular clerks like the 14th-century Parisian Jean Froissart, are our main source for the events of the period; the writers recording the major national and local events of their time. In his *Conquest of Ireland* Gerald of Wales, a churchman with both Norman and Welsh relations, gives us a contemporary (if somewhat partial) view of his family's participation in the early Anglo-Norman campaigns in Ireland in the 1170s; whilst his vibrant descriptions of Ireland and Wales give us some insight into the way in which such men experienced warfare in these cultural borderlands.

At the other end of the spectrum are the fictional works; the tenth- and 11th-century epics, like the *Song of Roland* or the series of tales about Duke William of Orange, which focus on the superhuman martial prowess of their heroes, and the later and more sophisticated romances, like those written about the knights of King Arthur by the French author Chrétien de Troyes in the 1170s and 1180s, where the blood-thirsty descriptions of knightly combat were juxtaposed alongside stories of courtly life and love. Whilst such tales cannot be taken as source material for actual historical events, and are as exaggerated as any Hollywood epic, they certainly do have an element of truth to them and, at the very least, reflect something of knightly aspirations and ideals.

Lying somewhere between these two types of source are the histories, such as the *Roman de Brut* and *Roman de Rou* written by another Norman cleric, Wace, in the mid-12th century. Telling the histories of Britain and Normandy respectively, from their foundations in the mythical past through to his own time, Wace's stories combine elements of both epic literature and chronicle narrative to tell an entertaining tale, a mixture of fact and fable. A similar tack is taken by the author of the *History of William Marshal*, a poem that records the life and deeds of one of the foremost English knights of the 11th and 12th centuries. Commissioned by William's son, the author interweaves the grand politics of the Anglo-Norman world with the excitement of the tournament and battlefield, and humorous anecdotes that reflect a man with a robust and earthy sense of humour alongside an acute political acumen, all couched in tones that are reminiscent of the epics and romances.

Not all of our sources were written by men who had never seen battle. A number of knights described the events in which they partook. In *The Life of Saint Louis* Jean de Joinville, an official in the royal court of the French king Louis IX, participated in and wrote about Louis' crusade into Egypt between 1248 and 1254, whilst the Flemish chronicler Jean le Bel had been a knight serving in the army of Edward III in the Weardale campaign of 1327, which sought unsuccessfully to bring the Scots to battle. Their descriptions of the hardships of campaign and the miseries of defeat are a fine counterpoint to the opulent images of knighthood in illuminated manuscript, the elegant progresses of the Arthurian knights of romance, or the rather dry narratives of the monkish chronicler.

The material available to us is not all narrative in form. There are administrative records, providing insights into who attended armies, what they were paid and how they were organized and expected to behave. The Order of the Knights Templars, since they were organized as a monastic order, had a 'Rule', a list of strictures by which they lived. These included, alongside regulations on the normal monastic duties, detailed instructions on how the knight-brothers were to be equipped and how they were to be arranged and conduct themselves on campaign. Whilst the Rule itself is unusual there can be little doubt that the practices it stipulates were common to knightly armies throughout Europe. Less practical, but no less important to our understanding of knighthood are works like the *Livre de Chevalerie* ('Book of Chivalry') written by Geoffrey de Charny around 1350. This book sought to teach young knights the highest ideals of the knighthood, as understood by a man who was one of the leading knights in Europe at that time, a founding member of the French Order of the Star and chosen to bear the sacred royal banner, the *Oriflamme*, into battle at Poitiers in 1356, where he was to lose his life.

By combining all such sources; narrative and fictional, instructional and administrative, visual and written, it is possible to put together a picture of the knight, his culture and his world between the 11th and 16th centuries.

CHRONOLOGY

What follows is a list of the key events, battles and sieges described in this book.

732

The battle of Poitiers (also known as the battle of Tours). The Frankish leader Charles Martel defeats the army of the Muslim Ummayid caliphate, arguably stemming the advance of Islam into Europe. The historian Lynn White Jr argued that Martel's victory was the result of the technological advantage of the use of the stirrup, and was a vital step in the development of the medieval knight.

1047

War between William 'the Bastard' (later 'the Conqueror') Duke of Normandy against Geoffrey Martel, Count of Anjou, during William's struggle to defeat rebel nobles and secure his position as duke. Included sieges of Le Mans and Alençon.

1066

The battle of Hastings, fought between William, Duke of Normandy (who claimed to have been nominated by King Edward the Confessor to succeed him as king), and Harold Godwinson (who had been given the throne by the English nobility on Edward's death). Seen by some as the triumph of Norman knights over English footsoldiers, during the battle Harold is killed and the English army destroyed, opening the way for William to become king and England to be integrated into the political and cultural world of mainland Europe.

1096–99

The First Crusade. A military expedition promoted by Pope Urban II to come to the aid of the Byzantine Empire and recover the Christian holy places lost to the Muslims. After sieges of the towns of Nicaea, Antioch and Jerusalem, and battles at Dorylaeum and Ascalon, the Christians are able to establish a series of lordships, the so-called 'crusader states' of the kingdom of Jerusalem, the principality of Antioch and the counties of Edessa and Tripoli. The crusade's success spawns a whole series of crusades over the next 400 years, the creation of the military Orders, and adds a new spiritual aspect to knightly culture.

1102

Siege of Bridgnorth. Bridgnorth Castle in the English county of Shropshire, held by the rebel baron Robert of Bêlleme, is besieged for three months by forces of King Henry I of England. Eventually the townspeople surrender, betraying the garrison of mercenary knights and locking them into the keep.

1109

Battle of Tinchebrai. Fought between Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy, and Henry I, King of England (William the Conqueror's first and third sons, respectively), for control of the duchy. Robert is defeated and imprisoned, and Normandy and England are united under Henry.

1119

Battle of Brémule. Fought between Henry I of England and Louis VI of France, the latter supporting Norman barons rebelling against Henry's rule of the duchy. Henry is victorious.

1124

Battle of Bourgthéroulde. Another battle in the struggle of Henry I to maintain a secure hold on the Duchy of Normandy. An army led by the Norman noble Count Waleran of Meulan supporting the claim of William Clito, Robert Curthose's son, is defeated by a force of Henry I's military household or *familia regis*.

1135–48

Civil war between Stephen of Blois and Matilda. After the death of Henry I the crown was given to his nephew Stephen of Blois, despite the fact that Henry (whose sons had all predeceased him) had named his daughter, Matilda, as heir to the throne and forced his barons to swear allegiance to her. The war over the succession sees battles and sieges fought both in England (including the battle of Lincoln in 1141, where Stephen is defeated and captured, and the siege of Malmesbury in 1153), and in Normandy, where Matilda's cause is taken up by her husband Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, and their son Henry. Eventually a settlement is made allowing Stephen to remain as king but with the throne going to Henry on Stephen's death, who is crowned Henry II in 1154.

1138

Battle of Northallerton. Also known as the Battle of the Standard, because of the large religious banner brought to the field by the Anglo-Norman army; an invading Scottish army is defeated by an English force largely composed of local levies and baronial *familiae* from northern England.

1169

Anglo-Norman forces invade Ireland in support of Diamart, King of Leinster. Defeating both Gaelic and Norse forces at Ossory in 1169 and capturing the Danish colony of Wexford in 1170, the Normans, mostly from lordships in southern and western Wales, establish the first English lordships in Ireland.

1189

Henry II's son Richard, supported by King Philippe Augustus of France, rebels against his father, the latest in a series of rebellions as the sons of Henry seek to gain power and lands from their father. Attacking through the County of Anjou (which Henry had inherited from his father Geoffrey) and attacking Le Mans, they defeat Henry and force his submission. Henry dies shortly afterwards, with Richard succeeding to the throne.

1189–92

The Third Crusade. Richard of England, Philippe Augustus of France and Leopold V of Austria lead a crusade to recapture Jerusalem, lost to the Ayyubid sultanate under Saladin in 1187. En route Richard's force land at Sicily, sacking the town of Messina in 1190, and Cyprus, which he conquers and later sells to the Order of the Temple. Despite the successes of the crusader army at the siege of Acre and the battle of Arsuf in 1191, the rivalries between the three Christian princes lead to Philippe and Leopold returning to Europe and Richard, unable to reach Jerusalem with the forces left to him, negotiates a treaty with Saladin granting Christian access to Jerusalem. On his return trip, Richard is captured and imprisoned by Leopold and ransomed for the sum of 150,000 marks.

1202–04

The Fourth Crusade. Originally called with the aim of recapturing Jerusalem by means of an invasion through Egypt, the expedition falls into financial difficulties and a large proportion of the crusading army is persuaded to assist the Venetians to recapture the city of Zara (on the Adriatic coast) from the Byzantines, in return for onward transport to the Holy Land. The crusading army goes on to become involved in a civil war between rivals for the Byzantine Imperial crown, eventually taking the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, sacking it and establishing their own Catholic emperor on the throne.

1209–29

The Albigensian Crusade. A series of military campaigns in response to the calls of Pope Innocent III to destroy the Cathar heresy centred in the southern French region of the Languedoc, but used by the northern French nobles to seize land in the south and by the French monarchy to assert its authority over what had been an almost independent region. It sees a series of battles and sieges, including that of the town of Béziers in 1209, which is captured by crusading forces, its population massacred and the town itself sacked and burned.

1214

Battle of Bouvines. Fought between Philippe Augustus of France and an allied army of Flemish and German knights in the service of the Holy Roman Emperor. The allied army is financed by John of England, in the hope that the campaign will draw attention away from his attempts to reclaim his family's lands on the continent. The decisive victory of the French destroys John's last hope of this and ensures Philippe's suzerainty over Normandy, Anjou and Brittany.

1215–17

First Barons' War. A civil war fought between John of England and rebel barons under Robert Fitz Walter, resulting from the king's refusal to abide by the Magna Carta, a document which sought to limit royal power. Including John's successful siege of Rochester Castle in 1215, it ends, after John's death in 1216, with the defeat in 1217 of a French army under Prince Louis.

1224

The siege of Bedford Castle. Held by troops loyal to the rebel baron Faukes de Breauté against Henry III. On their surrender Henry has almost all of the garrison hanged.

1248–54

The Seventh Crusade. Led by the French king Louis IX against Egypt, with the aim of using this as a springboard to the recapture of Jerusalem. The town of Damietta is taken relatively easily in 1249, but defeat outside of Mansourah in the following year, and starvation and disease whilst attempting to besiege the town, sees Louis and his remaining men captured and ransomed by the Mamluk ruler of Egypt, Baibars.

1264–67

The Second Barons' War. A civil conflict between King Henry III and his son Edward against rebel barons led by Simon de Montfort. The battle of Lewes in 1264 sees the Royalists defeated and Henry effectively de Montfort's prisoner. However the baronial army is defeated by royal forces led by the future Edward I at Evesham in 1265 during which Simon de Montfort is killed. The last remnants of the baronial rebels finally surrender after a six-month siege of the castle of Kenilworth.

1302

The battle of Courtrai. Fought between a French royal army and a force of Flemish militia troops, following an uprising by the people of the Flemish town of Bruges against the subjugation of Flanders to French rule. The French force, predominantly knightly cavalry, is resoundingly defeated by the militia in an engagement which is often seen as heralding a turning point in the dominance of the knight on the European battlefield.

1304

Siege of Stirling Castle. A siege fought during the Scottish wars of independence, which sees Edward I of England undertake a six-month siege of the castle, using 14 massive siege engines (including the enormous trebuchet 'Warwolf') to bring the Scottish garrison to terms.

1314

The battle of Bannockburn. Following another siege of Stirling Castle in the spring of 1314 (this time Scottish forces under King Robert the Bruce besieging an English garrison led by Sir Philip Mowbray), a truce is agreed under which the garrison would surrender the castle if not relieved by an English army by midsummer. Edward II of England brings an army north that summer, with the aim of relieving Stirling and destroying the Scottish army. Although the English force outnumbers the Scots several times over, dissension between Edward, the Earl of Gloucester and the Earl of Hereford sows disorder in the English ranks, leaving them prey to the Scottish spearmen and the English are routed. Bruce's forces go on to regain all the lands including the strategically vital and heavily fortified town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. English attempts to retake it fail in 1319, after a Scottish diversionary raid defeats English forces at Myton, destroying the last remnants of political cohesion between the king and his barons, and causing the army besieging Berwick to split up and return south.

1327

The Weardale campaign. The first campaign of Edward II's son, Edward III, sees an English force, supported by Flemish mercenaries including the future chronicler Jean le Bel, march to counter a Scottish incursion into northern England. Despite their best efforts the English forces are unable to bring the Scots to battle who, after launching a raid against the English camp and nearly killing the king, return back across the border.

1332

The battle of Dupplin Moor. Fought between forces loyal to Robert the Bruce's infant heir David II (aged just four when he succeeds his father) and English-backed rebels – 'The Disinherited' – supporting the rival claim of Edward Balliol. Although outnumbered, Balliol's men are able to achieve victory by combining dismounted men-at-arms with large numbers of archers; tactics which will be used by English armies until the 16th century.

1337–1453

The Hundred Years War. A series of wars fought between the English and French crowns, ostensibly over the claim of the English kings from Edward III onwards to the crown of

France. There are several key campaigns. In 1346 Edward III invades Normandy, besieging and sacking the town of Caen before defeating the French army at Crécy (although the English forces were in theory under the command of his 14-year-old son Edward of Woodstock, better known as 'the Black Prince'). He goes on to besiege the port of Calais for almost a year before it finally falls. In 1356 the Black Prince invades Gascony in south-west France, conducting a raid, or *chévauchée*, into French territory to relieve English garrisons trapped there. Caught by an army led by Jean II of France, Edward is able to win a decisive victory that sees Jean captured. The terms of his ransom cause substantial political unrest both amongst the nobility and in the form of a bloody peasants' revolt, known as the *Jacquerie*.

In 1360 the Treaty of Brétigny is concluded, which defines the borders of the continental holdings of the English crown in a swathe of territory along the western side of France. During this period of peace, the now unemployed garrison soldiers, known as *routiers*, ravage French lands as they seek to keep themselves in food and money. A civil war between rival claimants to the Spanish kingdom of Castile sees opposing claimants being supported by English and French forces respectively. At the battle of Nájera in 1366, Anglo-Gascon troops under the Black Prince, supporting Peter 'the Cruel' of Castile, defeat a Franco-Castilian army under the French captain Bertrand du Guesclin, supporting Henry of Trastámara.

War between England and France resumes in 1370, in campaigns which see the loss of many of England's finest commanders including Sir John Chandos, the Captal de Buch and, in 1376, the Black Prince himself. In 1377 Edward III dies, and the English throne goes to his grandson, the four-year-old Richard II. Not the warrior his father or grandfather had been, and troubled by rebellions in Scotland and Wales, Richard later attempts to negotiate a settlement to the conflict.

War with France resumes in earnest with Henry V's campaign of 1415. After besieging the Norman port of Harfleur, Henry and his army cross Normandy, aiming for English-held Calais. Outmanoeuvred and outnumbered, the king nonetheless wins a dramatic victory over the French at Agincourt, killing or capturing a large portion of the French nobility. In spite of his successes (which see the signature of the Treaty of Troyes in 1419, recognizing Henry's children as heirs to the French throne), the French are resurgent between 1429 and 1453, and the English lose almost all of their continental holdings with the exception of Calais.

1396

The battle of Nicopolis. A crusading force, comprising Hungarians, French, Venetians and the Order of the Hospitallers, is defeated by a Turkish army on the banks of the Danube in modern-day Bulgaria. It is seen as the last major crusading effort to be launched.

1455–85

The Wars of the Roses. A series of dynastic disputes for the control of the English throne between the noble Houses of York and Lancaster. Marked by long-running feuds between various noble families, often brought about by tit-for-tat executions, a number of battles are fought including the Yorkist victories at Mortimer's Cross and Towton (the largest battle on English soil of the middle ages, with some 50,000 combatants) in 1461 and at Barnet in 1471. The conflict effectively ends with the victory of the Lancastrian Henry Tudor over Richard III at Bosworth in 1485, and the former's accession to the throne as Henry VII.

1469–77

The Burgundian wars. A conflict between the Duchy of Burgundy, the kingdom of France and, eventually, the Swiss confederacy. It sees the defeat of the Burgundian *Ordnnance* armies by Swiss pike blocks at Grandson and Morat in 1476, and at Nancy in 1477, where the Burgundian Duke Charles the Bold is killed.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MEDIEVAL KNIGHT

It is the nature of historical study that the subject gets compartmentalized and divided into periods usually based upon some key event. In England the traditional view was that the middle ages began with 1066 and the Norman victory at Hastings and ended with the accession of Henry VII following Richard III's death at Bosworth in 1485. This is no longer the case: for example, those who study the kingdoms that developed after the fall of Rome have made the case for their own studies to be incorporated as the early middle ages. Even so, it may seem that the knight appeared out of thin air in the 11th century, being something entirely new; but this is far from the true state of affairs.

As far as medieval writers were concerned, there had always been knights. King Arthur had surrounded himself with knights in his fight against the Saxons in that semi-mythical period after the fall of Rome. Julius Caesar was described as a knight, whilst Alexander the Great was perceived as a great knightly hero, with epic stories created about his deeds. A 14th-century writer, describing the origins of heraldry, explained that the noble warriors of Troy had painted individual designs on shields so that their mothers, wives and children could better witness their deeds of valour from the city walls. Almost all of the nascent nations of medieval Western Europe saw themselves as in some way descended from warrior heroes fleeing the sack of Troy. Just as Rome had Aeneas so Britain had Brutus, and the French Francio, descended from the Trojan King Priam and his brother Antenor. In fact, knighthood was perceived to be older still; Judas Maccabeus and his Old Testament warriors had been knights, as had King David.

The knightly *ordo* (order) could boast a heritage older than the clergy, the second body that made up medieval society, and more exalted than the peasants and workers who comprised the third. Whilst these origins were quite fanciful (but no less significant to the knights' understanding of themselves, as we shall see when we come to look at chivalry), one can see some connections between the knight and classical Greece and Rome.

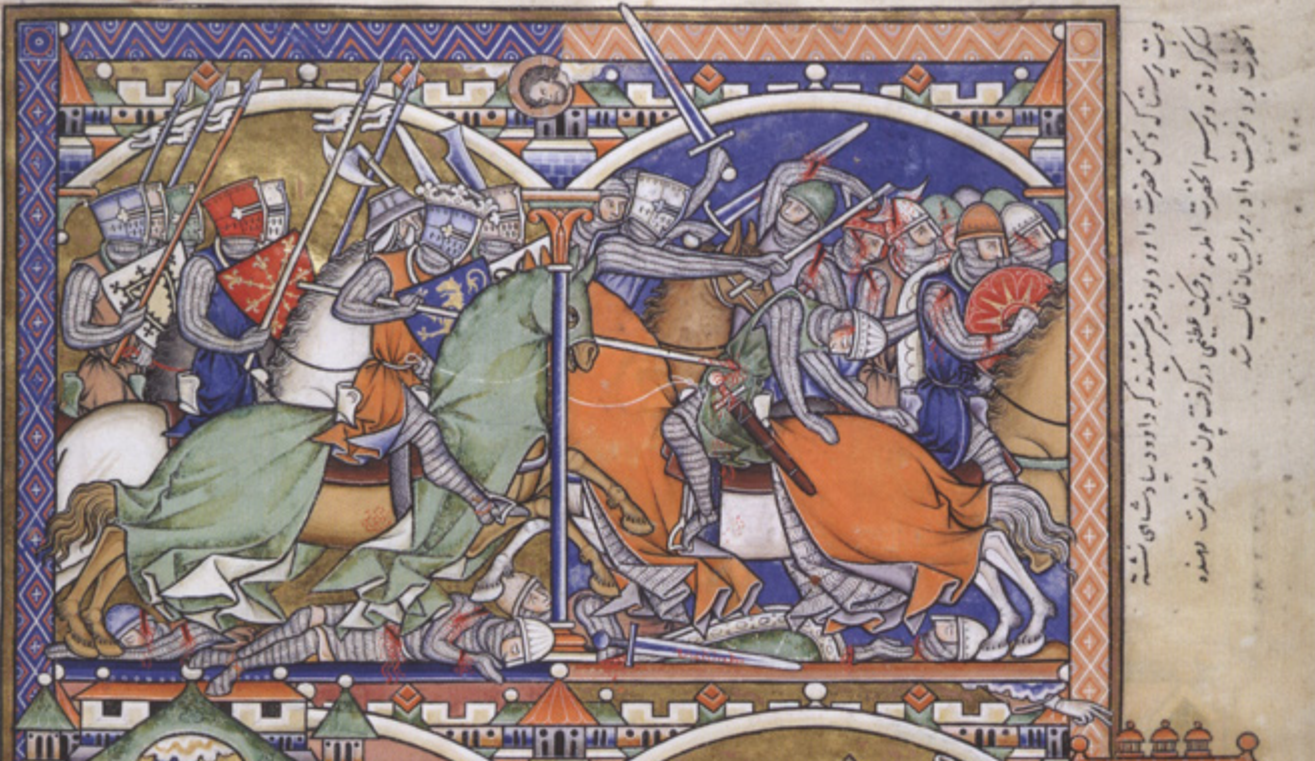
Many pre-industrial societies had a social and political elite whose position was based upon their role as warriors; because they supplied their own equipment the wearing of the best protection available was not only desirable, but also a way of displaying their wealth and status. The development of mounted combat, using chariots at first, then horseback cavalry, was another way of reinforcing the status and superiority of the warrior and of the elite within that dominant class. The mount and its attendant equipment were expensive to obtain and maintain, and it took time to master the necessary riding skills to take a chariot or horse into battle: time and resources that only the elite could afford. More than this, in mounting a horse or chariot the warrior was able to achieve superhuman speed and power and towered over his opponents (and his own lesser warriors), appearing to them as physically superior.

In both classical Greece and republican Rome, the warrior was still responsible for supplying his own arms and armour, and so the aristocracy continued to use their wealth to take them to the field on horseback and in the finest armour. Even though their dominance of the battlefield was lost to the more numerous infantry, mounted service was still an important validation of their social position, and the distinction outlasted the restructuring of the Roman army and the political changes of Rome's Principate and Empire.

There are a number of similarities between the medieval knight and the classical Roman 'equestrian' class. In both cases, membership was initially based upon service as cavalry. Increasingly, however, the status of these men crystallized so that they became a social and political elite, whilst military service as cavalry was performed by a broader group of people. The knightly classes in both periods provided the leadership cadre for the army, although the medieval knight continued to serve as cavalry to a much greater extent than the Roman equestrians. In both cases, the membership of the knightly elite fluctuated and changed as the socio-political situation also developed. In the third century AD it appears that the equestrian order was expanded by the entry of a class of knights who gained their position through junior military command in the provinces, and who replaced the traditional Italian aristocracy in the top military and civilian jobs. Similarly, the knightly class of high medieval Western Europe saw its numbers expand in the 14th century when the non-knightly squires and gentry began to acquire similar status as a result of their military service. In both cases, men of equestrian or knightly families might also find service within the civilian administration or as priests. In the late Roman period, after the reign of the Emperor Constantine, just as in Europe in the Renaissance, the equestrian class became almost completely divorced from its martial origins, becoming merely a social, aristocratic elite.

Opposite: The top left corner of this illustration shows King David as a knight from the 13th century. Medieval artists had no qualms about depicting figures from the past in contemporary clothing and armour, but there was also a strong desire to see an ancient pedigree for knighthood. (Scala)

Valr̄ diuulgata fama. q̄d. dauit sup omnem isrl̄ regnaret. philistini in unum collecti om̄s p̄fecti sunt ad querendū eum. Dauit aūt consulto dn̄o / obuiā p̄cedens magna eos cede p̄strauit.



وبت پرستان که دشمن حضرت داوود بودند خبر شنیدند که داوود بپادشاهی نشسته
لشکر کردند و بر سر انحضرت امدند و جنگ عظیمی درگرفت چون خدا انحضرت دهنده
انحضرت بود و فتح داد و بر ایشان غالب شد

و حضرت داوود فرمود که صندوق خدا را از قلعه او در ارند و مردم باستقبال صندوق بیرون امدند و یکی از پسران کشیش دست برای صندوق دراز کرد در ساعت بمرد

Valr̄ Dauit cum omni p̄plo arcam dn̄i nouo plaustro īpositam reducit. ð domo Aminadab. Cui duo filij ducebant currum. Dauit aūt cum p̄plo ludebat ante eam. Sz cū bobꝰ calcitrantibꝰ arca cepisset inclinari maior filioꝝ Aminadab manū extendens arcam tenuit. p̄pt quā temeritatem ibi iuxta archā diuina īdignatōe percussus obcubuit. Quo viso contristatus et exterritꝰ Dauit et metuens in domū suam arcam ducere. in domū Obededom getthei / eam introduxit.

و انحضرت از برای صندوق اندیشه کرد و گفت ان صندوق را بخانه یکی از ان مردم ببرید پنهان کردند

Given these apparent similarities it should not be surprising that scholars have generally chosen to translate the term 'equestrian' as 'knight'. One should not stretch the comparison too far, however. In spite of the similarities between them the equestrian class of Rome was not the same as the medieval knightly class, nor was the one to evolve into the other. The armies of Rome through to the sixth century comprised standing forces of more or less professional, paid soldiery. The equestrian class was a small part of these forces, providing the officer cadre. By comparison, the armies of the high middle ages (the period in which our knights become dominant) were not permanent organizations nor were the warriors full-time, paid soldiers. Furthermore, the knight was a significant part, both in numbers and importance, of those armies. There is, then, a discontinuity between the military of the Roman period and that of the middle ages. In order to find the origins of our medieval knight we must look to the development of the post-Roman 'barbarian' kingdoms.

Through the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries it became increasingly difficult to recruit troops for the Roman army, especially following its expansion under the rule of the Tetrarchy, when power was shared (uneasily) between two 'emperors' and two 'Caesars'. Increasing numbers of citizens acquired exemption from military service and the shortfall was made up by recruiting barbarian peoples from beyond the frontiers: individuals, war bands, even whole tribes. The army became divorced from the civilian government and population, subject to its own laws and the jurisdiction of its commanders. It sought to differentiate itself from the population of the region in which it was stationed by taking on the cultural identity of the barbarian troops who had been recruited for it. As the western empire fell apart, these 'barbarized' units became the basis of new regional identities and their commanders, the majority of whom were of barbarian origins, became kings of peoples and settled their followers in the territories they governed. Military service and barbarian ethnicity became synonymous; to be (for the sake of example) Frankish was to be a warrior, and conversely to be a warrior was to be Frankish (or Lombard, Goth, Vandal and so on). 'Barbarians' fought, 'Romans' paid taxes. This ethnicity and martial status became hereditary, with the sons of Franks or Goths being themselves considered Franks or Goths and inheriting the status, land, martial obligations and privileges of their fathers.

During the seventh and eighth centuries the ethnic, 'barbarian' identities that had differentiated between the warrior and civilian populations were adopted by free men, the landholding class, who thereby gained the exemptions from taxation and the legal and political privileges but also the liability for military service that went with barbarian ethnicity. Those free men who did not re-brand themselves in this way lost their freedom and became dependants of the 'barbarian' elite. As a result the social group from which the army was raised became a landholding class. That said, landholding was still not a prerequisite for military service – it was sufficient that the individual was free – and there was still no formal system of granting land for service, nor were all grants permanent or hereditary. Increasingly, however, the warrior became entitled not to the revenues of the portion of land which was earmarked for his support but to the land itself.

The expansion of the pool of men liable for military service brought about another change in the social organization of the military classes. Late Roman generals and the post-Roman kings and aristocrats had always had bodyguards, groups of specially selected experienced warriors. The relationship between them was characterized by their name. In the late Roman period such units were called *bucellarii* (literally 'biscuit eaters') because they were fed, paid and supported by the individual commander rather than the state. In the middle of the seventh century, in part as a reaction to the larger pool of those eligible for military service, such bodyguard units became increasingly important. We see in the source material two particular groups: the *pueri* and the *scarae*. The *pueri* were young warriors serving a military apprenticeship within the royal household; they would receive arms and armour as well as training in both weapons handling and military tactics, staying there until they reached an age when they would marry, acquire property and join the ranks of the aristocracy. The *scarae* (the term is Frankish, but there were similar bands under different titles in the other post-Roman kingdoms) were parties of chosen warriors, experienced and well-equipped men who formed the focus and core of royal armies from this period on. Membership of these bodies enabled the elite warrior to distinguish himself as a professional, regaining his distinctiveness from the bulk of the free population who, whilst expected to perform military service if called upon, were not first and foremost warriors.

A FALSE DAWN? CAROLINGIAN WARFARE AND THE MYTH OF MOUNTED SHOCK COMBAT

The reign of the Carolingian dynasties in Western Europe, running from around 752 to 987, has been seen as a defining period in the origins of the middle ages and the knight. Although a number of different writers contributed to the theory, the most holistic and, in terms of popular understanding, influential treatment was Lynn White Jr's 'the stirrup and mounted shock combat' in his book *Medieval Technology and Social Change*.

A historian of technology, he argued that the introduction of the stirrup into Western European culture changed the nature of cavalry combat. For the first time, he argued, the cavalryman had a stable and secure fighting platform. No longer restricted to throwing javelins or shooting arrows, as his classical predecessors had been, the warrior horseman of the eighth century onwards was able to close with his enemy and assault him with sword and couched lance, inflicting blows with a power that would have knocked a man without stirrups out of his saddle. This development came just at the right time, for the campaigns of the Frankish prince Charles Martel were directed against the Arabs of the Iberian Peninsula whose territory was expanding north through the Pyrenean passes. Their armies were dominated by cavalry and so it was necessary to raise cavalry-heavy armies to oppose them. Such heavy cavalry was expensive to raise and maintain, in terms of both mounts and arms and armour. To ensure that these warriors had the wherewithal for the role they were now expected to perform, Charles and his successors began to redistribute land, taking it away from the abbeys and churches and granting it to their military retainers. Thus, in Lynn White Jr's mind, the introduction of the stirrup was the catalyst for heavy, knightly cavalry and the feudal system. He concluded the chapter on the subject by saying that 'The man on horseback, as we have known it in the past millennium, was made possible by the stirrup, which joined man and steed into a fighting organism. Antiquity imagined the Centaur; the early Middle Ages made him the master of Europe.'[*]

There were flaws in White Jr's theory. Whilst the Frankish monarchy did increase the number of horses that they used in their armies, it was not in response to the threat from Islamic cavalry. Charles Martel's great victory over them at Poitiers in 732 was won by an army that still fought predominantly on foot. The couched lance tactic, as we shall see, was not an invention of the eighth century but was only just coming into use in the early 11th and would not become the norm until the end of that century. Finally it was not the stirrup but developments in the saddle that turned the knight and mount into a united force behind the top of the lance.

Certainly, Frankish warfare did change during this period. The nature of landholding developed further so that whilst in the late sixth and seventh centuries the granting of land had been done by kings as a reward for service, in the eighth and ninth centuries individual aristocratic families now retained large estates of their own. These lands were used to create networks of followers within the local region, securing their loyalty by making a grant impermanent (a system called *precaria*) and often conditional upon the provision of some form of service (which need not have been military). As a result of this new style of landholding a larger number of warriors had

Opposite: Carolingian soldiers from the St Gall psalter, c.875: more biblical warriors in contemporary dress. Whilst often described as heavily armoured, the Carolingian horseman was still more lightly equipped than his counterpart in the 11th century. (The Art Archive)

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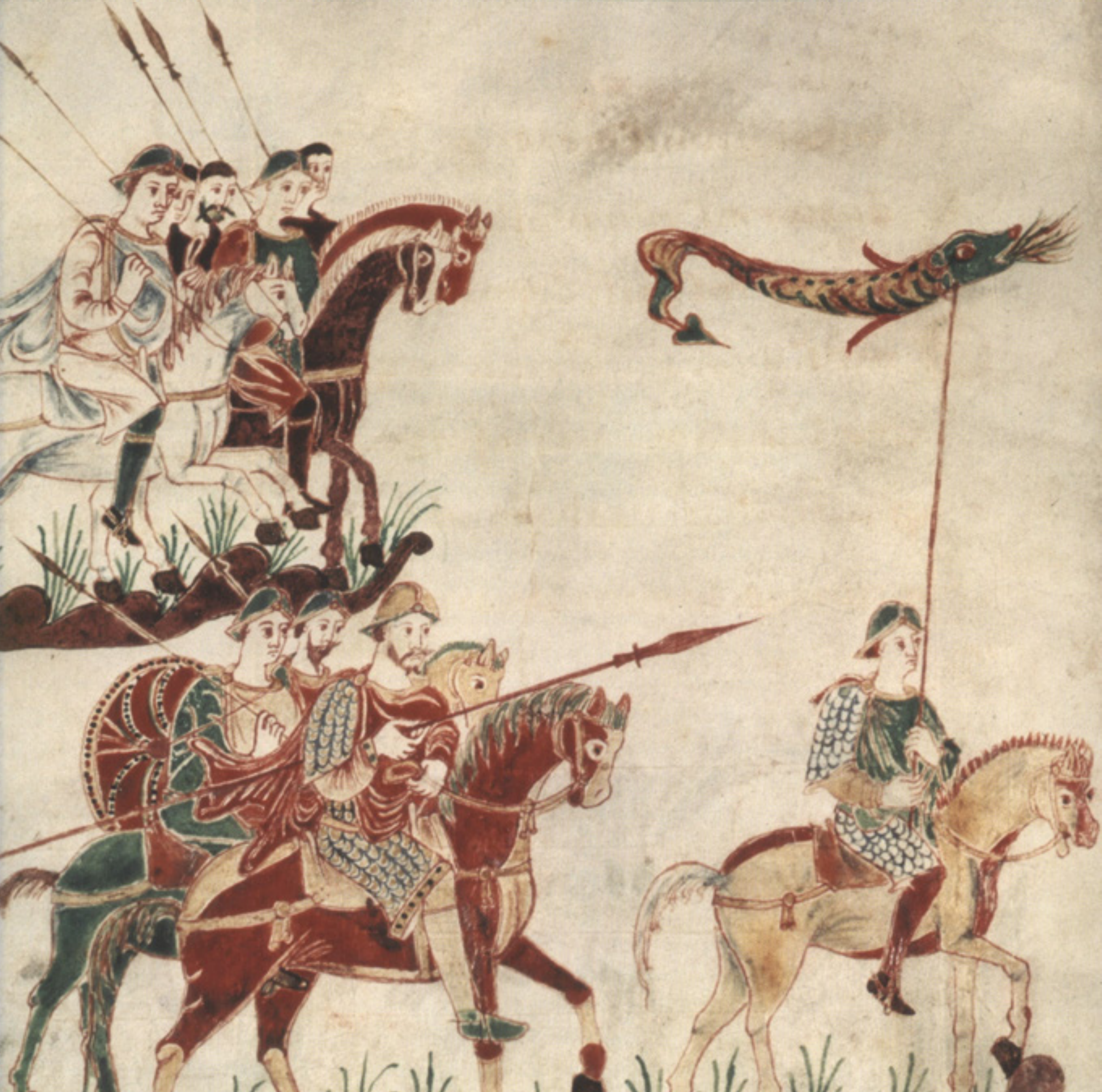
[*] Lynn White Jr, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, pp.1–38.



T SYRIAM SOBAL · ET CONUERTIT
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the incomes to afford to maintain themselves with full armour and horses, but they were now tied to the particular lord to whom they owed service rather than directly to the king. Armies were no longer recruited and organized directly by royal officials; instead they were made up of the aristocratic elite and their bands of followers, coming together to serve in royal armies at the behest of the court. As long as the Carolingian monarchs pursued aggressive campaigns – pushing the borders of their lands into Saxony, Bavaria and down into Lombardy as well as westwards over the Pyrenees – then these noble households were willing and eager to serve, as there was loot and more land to be gained. When the limits of that expansionist policy had been reached, however, and the focus switched instead to defensive campaigns against the invading Viking armies, it became much more difficult to persuade the aristocratic class to respond to calls to serve. The benefits of campaigning were simply not enough of an incentive for them to muster. It is at this point that we start to see monarchs trying to regulate the terms of the military service they were to receive, with the imposition of penalties for failure to appear at musters.

In spite of the dominant position of the aristocracy in the way in which armies were raised and structured in this period, the Carolingian monarchs were still able to use the household troops that we saw some two centuries before. *Scarae* continued to be used by monarchs as a quick reaction force, and the bands of *pueri* continued to serve out their apprenticeships within the royal household, before moving on to marry and take land of their own. The kings were not above employing mercenary forces, including Viking raiders, who could be turned against other Viking bands or indeed rebel lords. The Duchy of Normandy was founded in this way, created from land already colonized by the Viking leader Rollo, who was confirmed as duke of Normandy by the Frankish king Charles the Simple in 912.

The fragmentation of the Carolingian Empire after the death of Charles the Fat in 888 ensured that the aristocratic elite continued to grow in power at the expense of royal government. By the time Hugh Capet succeeded to the throne of France in 939, the French kings were little different from the aristocratic elite; indeed they were less powerful than many aristocrats (it would take nearly three hundred years for them to be able to fully assert their regal authority). In effect the counts and dukes of the various French provinces were monarchs in all but name, raising their own armies and fighting internecine wars against each other with scant regard for royal authority. Such conflict encouraged the support and maintenance of small numbers of heavily armed and armoured professional soldiers, mounted so as to be able to raid swiftly into an enemy's territory, or to respond to such raids themselves. The lords recruited these men from amongst the peasant population, adding them to their aristocratic households under the title of *vassus* ('vassal') or, more commonly *miles*; the knight had come of age.

As we shall see, the social and military position of the knight would continue to develop through the rest of the tenth and into the 11th century before it displayed all of the aspects which we might expect of it. But then, as we have already said, the knight evolved, developed and changed throughout his existence.

The knight and the culture that surrounded him also spread beyond the land of his origins in northern and central France. In some cases this occurred through settlement, as with the creation of the so-called Latin kingdoms in the Holy Land following the First Crusade, when European noblemen carved out European-style lordships for themselves. In other cases there was an imitation and adoption of knightly culture. In regions like southern France and Spain, for example, the warrior elite had began to take on aspects of the culture of their northern French neighbours, combining it with their own to create a knighthood with very particular regional flavour. In 12th-century Scotland the monarchs imported Norman nobility from England, planting them in lowland lordships. In the highland areas the nobility and warriors remained distinctly Gaelic, and it was not until the 15th century that the knightly culture really took hold. There was a similar distinction in Ireland, between the 'English' lordships on the east coast, formed following the invasion of Anglo-Normans under Richard de Clare, second Earl of Pembroke (known as 'Strongbow'), in support of the king of Leinster in 1169, and the Gaelic lordships in the Irish interior.

Although the pace might vary, throughout Europe there was a continuous expansion and evolution of knights and knighthood. Nowhere is this process of change more obvious than in their arms and armour, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER ONE

ARMS AND ARMOUR

OVER THE 500 YEARS THAT THIS BOOK COVERS, THE ARMS AND armour of the knight were in a state of constant evolution. The changes wrought were dramatic; if one compares the knights on the Bayeux Tapestry with those in the 15th-century Beauchamp Pageant it would be difficult to recognize them as the same creature.

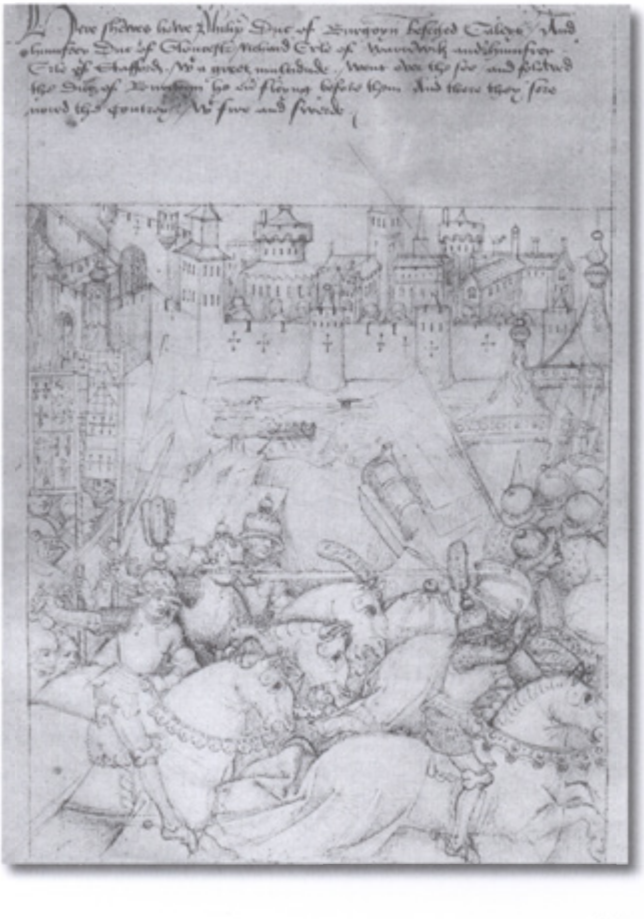
It is easy to assume that this development was a linear one and that over time the knight's armour became increasingly complex and resilient whilst his weapons – in particular his sword and lance – stayed more or less the same. In fact the nature and evolution of the knight's war-gear is a much more complex matter than might first appear.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNIGHTLY ARMS AND ARMOUR

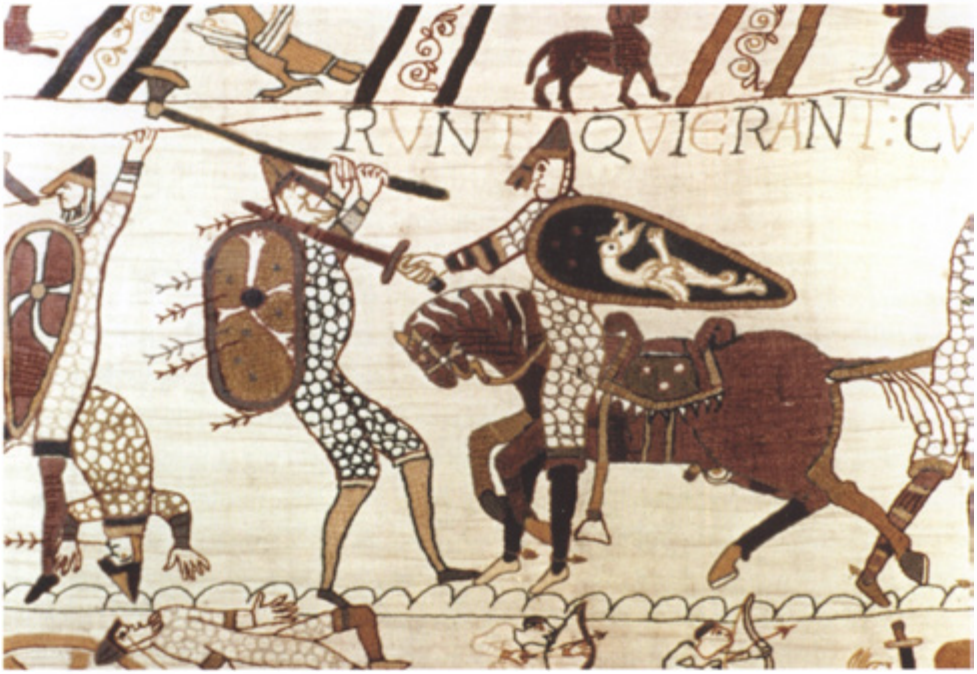
Whilst it is possible to chart the development of medieval arms and armour between the 11th and 16th centuries chronologically, the task is by no means a straightforward one. Unlike the modern sports car, with which armour is often compared, there are no clear dates for the development of particular styles, at least until the late 15th century, and no way of linking a particular style to a particular maker. Styles of armour tended to continue for decades, stretching the chronology out and overlapping newer forms. If cared for, the equipment could last a very long time, being captured and re-used, passed down and sold on over many years. Although the higher nobility and monarchs might have sufficient wealth to appear *à la mode*, for many knights and men-at-arms this would simply not have been possible, and they would have taken to the field in armour maybe 20 or 30 years behind the latest fashions. Individual pieces might be altered to match with the latest fashions; mail in particular would lend itself to being re-cut and re-tailored. A mail shirt, for example, might have its arms extended, mittens added or an integral coif fitted. Equally a coif might easily be removed when the owner decided that he would replace his old great helm for a bascinet which did not require, indeed would not fit over, such protection.

Artistic depictions of arms and armour can offer some chronological framework but dating can still be problematic. Even where we can establish a clear date for a particular work (difficult in most cases before the late middle ages), there are uncertainties; for whilst it was the norm for artists of the time to depict historical and biblical subjects in contemporary clothing and war-gear, this did not stop them from inserting old-fashioned, exotic or fantastical elements into their work, particularly when the subject was the foreigner or the 'bad guy' (often the two were synonymous). Nor did it prevent them from drawing on earlier images as templates, copying not just the artistic style but also the archaic equipment depicted. Many 11th- and early 12th-century depictions of war use ninth- and tenth-century manuscript illuminations as their exemplars. Nor should we assume that the artist had a clear idea of what he was depicting. Although it would be wrong to think of all medieval illustrators as monks shut away in cloisters and completely oblivious to the outside world, not every illuminator would have had the time, opportunity or inclination to make a detailed study of armour. This, alongside the limitations of the medium and of the artistic styles of the time, means that it can be difficult to discern exactly what is being depicted.

Brasses, effigies and other sculpture are more revealing, particularly since they depict their subject in the round and in meticulous detail. There are still limitations. How, for example, are we to interpret pieces of plate armour on late 12th- and 13th-century effigies? Are they iron defences or made from *cuir bouilli* – hardened leather? What are we to make of the stiffened shoulders on some sculptures of knights from the mid-13th century? Are they an indication of padding to offer protection or are they merely stiffened as a fashion statement to emphasize the breadth of the shoulders? The question of dating is no easier than with a manuscript illustration. Very often the identity of the individual who lay beneath the monument is impossible to ascertain. The painted heraldic arms which once would have adorned his shield are all too often lost to the rigours of time or the puritanism and whitewash of the Reformation or Victorians. Even where we are able to identify the subject, a number of questions still face us. Effigies are rarely portraits of the deceased; only the most prestigious figures, such as Edward III's son Edward the Black Prince, warranted such specialist treatment. Instead sculptors produced effigies according to workshop patterns in response to contracts like the one written in 1419 that simply required that the effigy be made to represent 'an esquire, armed at all points'.



Knights in combat from the 15th-century Beauchamp Pageant. In contrast to the knights on the Bayeux Tapestry these men are encased in plate amour and ride horses covered in cloth and plate housings. (The Art Archive)



A knight of the 11th century from the Bayeux Tapestry. There is little to distinguish the Norman knight from the armoured Saxon warriors, except for his mount. (Getty Images)

If the armour is not an exact copy of that owned and worn by the deceased, but comes out of some form of pattern book, we have to ask how we date this. Is it of a style contemporary with the date of the deceased's death, or with the years of his greatest military achievements, which might be almost half a century earlier? Could it be the harness of a knight of a much later date? Might it in fact be older, a style that the sculptor was comfortable and familiar with? The answers can be difficult if not impossible to come by.

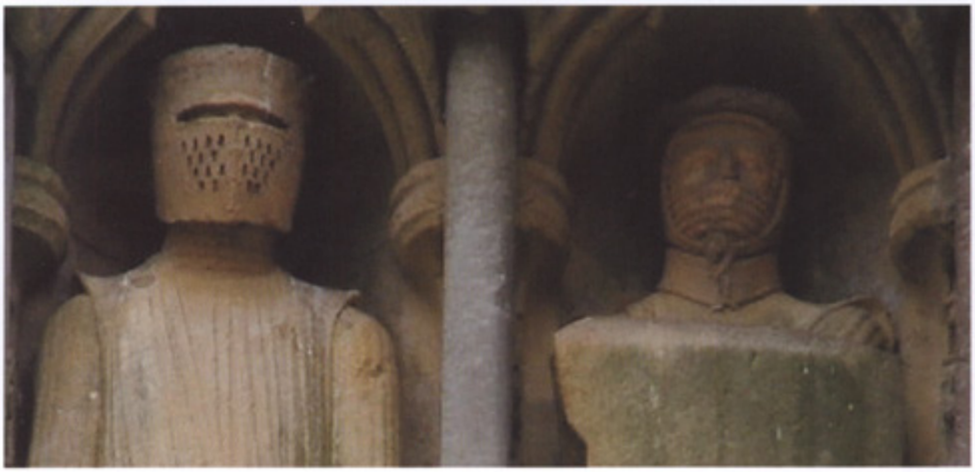
If we move from the visual sources to the written ones, things become yet more comlicated. It is very often difficult to interpret exactly what is being described by the writers. They share the illuminator's habit of incorporating exoticisms and anachronisms into their narrative, showing their scholarship and learning by making use of classical but anachronistic words and phrases, even on occasion lifting whole passages from classical texts as a representation of what a battle should be. Administrative records are equally tricky, and often no more helpful than the narratives. Often a bureaucratic shorthand is used, or different clerks might choose a different term for the same piece of armour at different times. Add to this the fact that we are dealing with a multi-lingual world, where Latin and Old French were both being used in official documents, making the drawing of comparisons between documents difficult indeed, and then include colloquial terms as well. With bureaucratic abbreviations, shifts in terminology and clerical idiosyncrasies, and a lack of explanation of technical terms (after all the compiler of the document and those using it both knew what he was talking about) the task of deciphering what is being described becomes very problematic indeed.

A CHRONOLOGY OF ARMOUR DEVELOPMENT

Taking these difficulties into account it is still possible, by drawing on the wide variety of sources, to outline in general terms the developments and changes that took place in 'knightly' armour. By the mid-11th century the norm for Western European armour was that it was made of mail, generally consisting of a *hauberk* – a shirt reaching the wearer's knees, with elbow-length sleeves and, occasionally, a coif that protected the wearer's head. Some form of *ventail*, a flap of mail attached to the coif to protect the lower half of the face, might also have been used this early on; depictions of them are rare but it seems the most likely explanation for the peculiar squares that are seen on the chests of some of the Norman warriors on the Bayeux Tapestry. Over the coif the 11th-century knight invariably wore a conical helmet with a nosepiece, or *nasal*. This might be raised as a single piece or made up of two or more panels riveted to an outer framework – the so-called *Spangenhelm* mode of construction that had been the norm from the late Roman and early medieval period.

During the course of the latter half of the 11th century and into the 12th there was relatively little change in the protection the knight wore. The amount of mail increased somewhat: in the Tapestry very few warriors wear long-sleeved hauberks that completely protect the arm, but by the 1100s almost all knights are depicted so. Similarly, whilst only three key individuals in the Tapestry appear to be wearing mail *chausses* or leggings, by the 1120s this seems to have been the norm. By the middle of the 12th century the hauberk clearly incorporated the coif and ventail as a single piece and often incorporated protection of the hands in mail mittens. The helmet continued to be of the nasal type, but for a brief period in the second quarter of the century there was a widespread fashion for the crown of the helm to slope forwards. Whilst it has been suggested that this may have been some kind of reinforcement for the brow and crown of the helm, it is far more likely that it was an early example of armour mimicking civilian fashions, the shape of the helm reflecting the forward-sloping 'Phrygian' cap popular in ordinary dress in the same period.

The first dramatic change in the appearance of the knight occurred towards the end of the 12th century, with the return of spectacle-shaped protection for the face –



Mid-13th-century knights from the west front of Wells Cathedral, c.1250. The stiffening on the shoulders of the surcoat may have been little more than fashion, but note the substantially padded coif and stiff neck defence of the figure on the right. (Author's Collection)

something last seen in Europe in Germanic and Scandinavian helmets nearly 200 years previously. This probably developed at first by widening the nasal and improving its protection by the inclusion of cross pieces. By the last decade of the 12th century it had become a full face mask. At the same time the shape of the helmet itself changed, first becoming dome-like and then flattening off across the top. It still sat at brow level however, the back and sides of the head being protected only by the mail coif. It is always dangerous to speculate on the reasons behind such changes, especially in these early periods where we lack the detailed narratives that might offer an explanation, but it would seem likely that they were a response to the use of the couched lance in combat. The mask would offer better protection to the face whilst the flat-topped helmet might hide a greater amount of padding protecting the head from the shock of such blows, and might also make it less likely that a glancing blow would slide up the crown of the helm, pushing back the head, damaging the neck and tipping the warrior from the saddle.

The helm continued to change into the 13th century, the back and sides descending to protect the head, becoming the classical pot helm. Beneath it the mail coif and ventail remained in use, and padding was provided by a linen coif, quilted or stuffed to fit the shape of the helm. Since these were normally worn beneath the mail often the only indication we have of their presence is the curiously square heads of many of the effigies and carvings of the period. Some form of padded coat, an *aketon*, was probably worn throughout our period, although these are not represented in our visual source material until the 12th century when they started to peek beneath the skirt of the hauberk.* In the latter half of the 13th century we also begin to see a similar form of padding being used to protect the thighs and the knees. In some images and effigies the shoulders of the surcoat appear to stand proud, suggesting that they too were padded, although whether for defence or merely as decoration is unclear.

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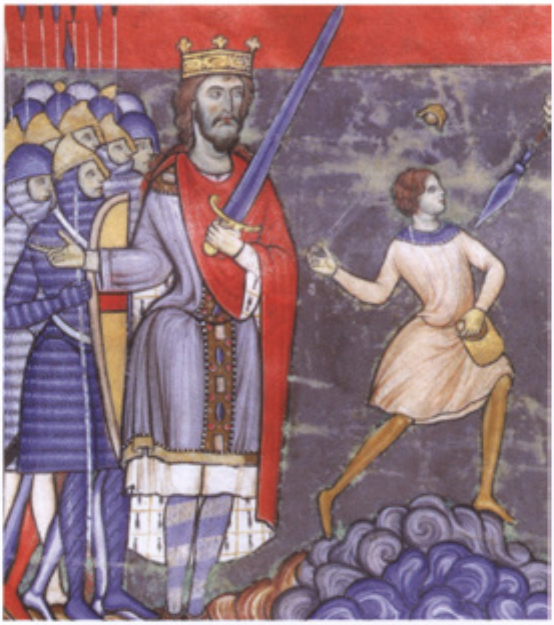
* The strange coat decorated with triangles seen worn by Bishop Odo in the Bayeux Tapestry has been described as an *aketon* by some, but the nature of the medium makes it very difficult to be sure that this is what is in fact being depicted.

The body's protection continued to be of mail in much the same form as in the 12th century. In the latter half of the 13th century, however, the first solid defences began to appear. Knee and elbow caps are the most obvious, visible on a number of effigies. The highly decorative nature of some of these, with their intricate foliate designs, would suggest that they were made of *cuir bouilli* rather than iron or steel but, as noted above, it is almost impossible to be certain.

One of the main problems faced in interpreting armour of the high middle ages is that from the 12th century through to the mid-14th century the knight's body was covered by a voluminous surcoat, which hid the armour beneath. This means that we are not certain at what point the first plate defences for the torso appeared. One of the effigies from the Temple church in London, identified as Gilbert Marshal and therefore dated to the 1250s, has a series of buckles just visible under his right armpit, which would suggest some form of coat-of-plates: broad bands of iron riveted to an outer skin of leather. This is clearer in the contemporary sculpture of St Maurice at Magdeburg Cathedral, where the saint is depicted wearing a surcoat which is clearly stiffened and marked with rows of rivets top and bottom. Something of the nature of these coats can be discerned by looking at the remains of several found amongst the corpses in the mass graves at Wisby in Gotland. Although the battle was fought in 1361 the remains recovered were those of the Gotland militia whose equipment was certainly out of date, even if it was not itself 50 or 60 years old. We also see evidence of splinted defences, constructed in a similar manner to the coat-of-plates being used to protect the shins and forearms.

From the 14th century the pace of change in armour increased dramatically. The helmet continued to grow in size and weight: whilst the mid-13th-century 'pot helm' had skimmed the jaw line, the 14th-century 'great helm' now came down almost to shoulder level. Beneath it an added layer of protection, a close-fitting iron cap or *cervelliere*, was worn, originally dish-shaped but growing to cover the sides and back of the head, becoming the 'bascinet'. This extra protection obviated the need for a full mail coif, which was reduced to a curtain of mail, called an *aventail*, suspended from the bascinet's edge.



Knights in Phrygian helms from the early 12th century. There appears to have been a relatively short-lived fashion for forward-sloping helms that mimicked the caps being worn at the time. (Scala)

At this period the process of smelting changed, allowing an increase in the size of the bloom (the lump of iron smelted from the ore). This allowed larger pieces of plate armour to be produced. At the same time developments in the quality of iron and also the beginnings of steel production occured, allowing for increasingly complex shapes to be forged. Thus from the latter half of the 14th century plate armour began to dominate. By the 1340s the sources clearly show a wide variety of plate defences, both splinted and solid, being used. The coat-of-plates evolved into the back- and breastplate, with the strips of metal becoming increasingly large and shaped to the contours of the wearer, connected with sliding rivets or leather strapping beneath the plates rather than having to be riveted to an outer garment. Similarly the splinted protection on arms and legs was replaced by solid defences whilst the *cuir bouilli* coverings on joints gave way to plate caps for shoulders (*spaulders*), elbows (*couters*) and knees (*poleyns*). We also see some of the first plate coverings for the foot: a layer of articulated plates lying over the top of the foot that eventually developed into all-encompassing steel 'shoes', or *sabatons*. Despite all of this plate a mail shirt still underpinned the whole ensemble, protecting large areas which the plates could not cover. These were, for the most part, the areas which required freedom of movement, such as the shoulder, under-arm and lower torso. Meanwhile the mail aventail protected the neck and collarbone (although we do see some early examples of plate neck protection starting to appear), and mail chausses protected the backs of the legs. Padded armour in the form of the aketon continued to be worn beneath the armour, but we also see it worn over the plate, as a padded coat or *gambeson*.

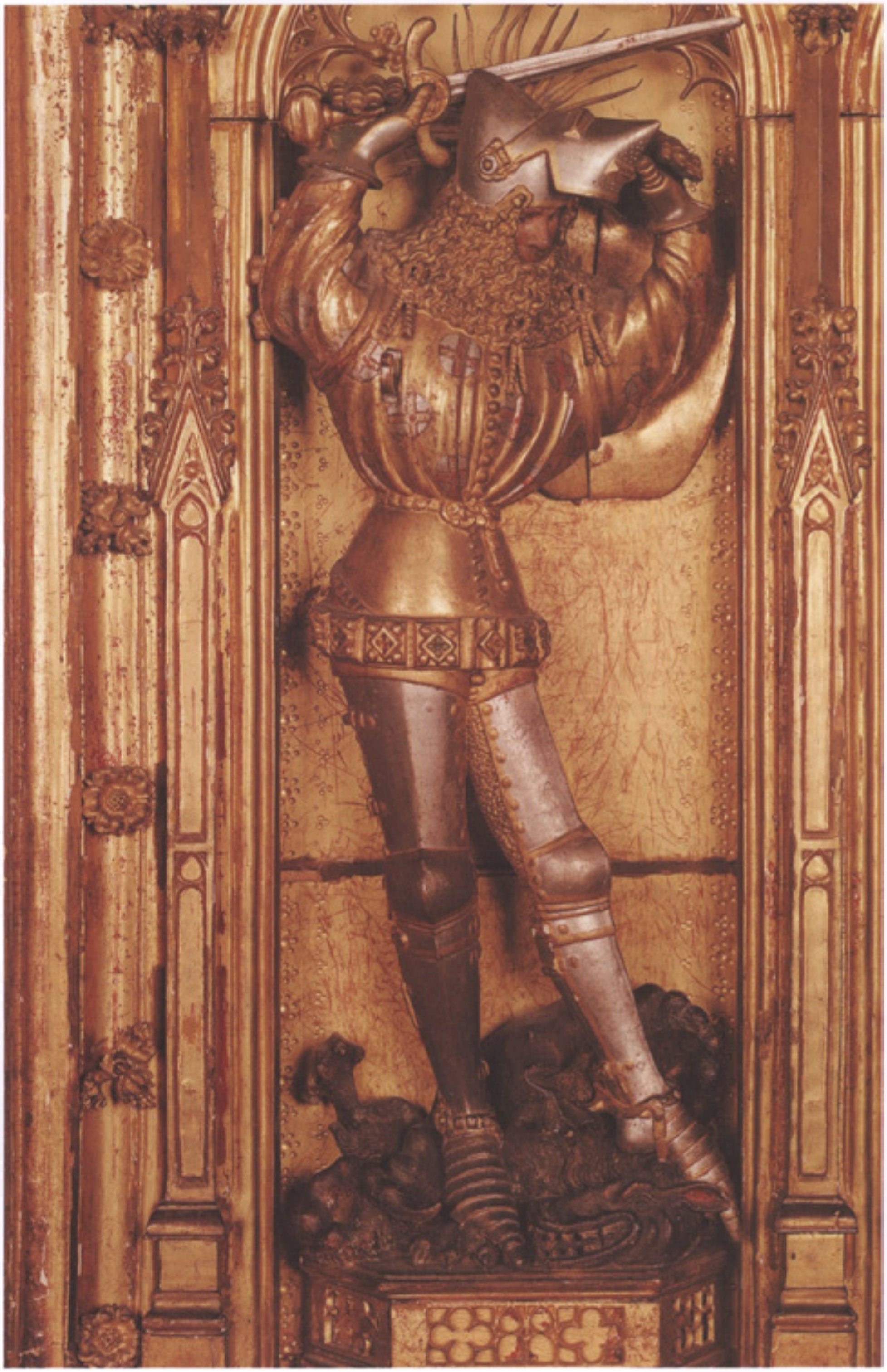
By the end of the century the great helm had fallen out of favour for battlefield use, the bascinet being considered sufficient protection and offering better mobility. The face was protected by a removable visor, hinged either at the front – the *Klappvisor* style more common to German-made helmets – or at the sides. The shape of the visor varied, some being fairly flat-faced whilst others sported the characteristic beak which gives us the popular (and wholly modern) names of 'hounskull' or 'pig-faced' bascinets.

By the end of the 14th century plate armour was definitely in the ascendant. The breastplate, now of a solid, single-piece construction, rounded and bulbous in form (again reflecting clothing fashions), had a skirt of articulated plates (the *fauld*) that protected the abdomen, whilst a mail skirt protected the groin. The limbs were almost fully encased. The arms were covered by *rerebraces* and *vambraces* for the upper and lower arms respectively, the elbow joint protected by the couter. The shoulder might still only have the small cap-like spaulder, but larger and more complex *pauldrons*, which flared out in order to protect the shoulder through the full range of its movement, were also to be found. The hands were protected by gauntlets, the form of which had been developing along the same lines as the rest of the armour, starting off with a splinted construction but increasingly consisting of complex shaped plates. The feet, likewise, were covered in sabatons of metal segments, or *lames*, the calves in fully enclosed, plate greaves, the knee in poleyns and the upper leg in cuisses, originally padded, quilted or even made of riveted plates as before, but by around 1400 made of plate covering the front and outside of the thigh.

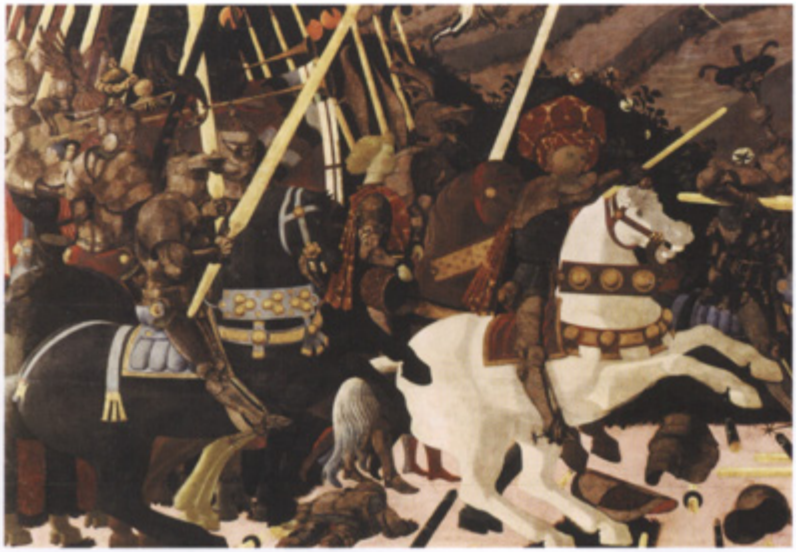
Whilst the iconic 'hounskull' bascinet was still very common, a variant had developed by 1400. The 'grand bascinet' retained many of the same elements of its smaller cousin but on a more massive scale. The aventail disappeared, replaced by a solid neck defence. The visor was still of one piece and hinged at the sides, but the features became blunted, giving it a sort of bulldog appearance.

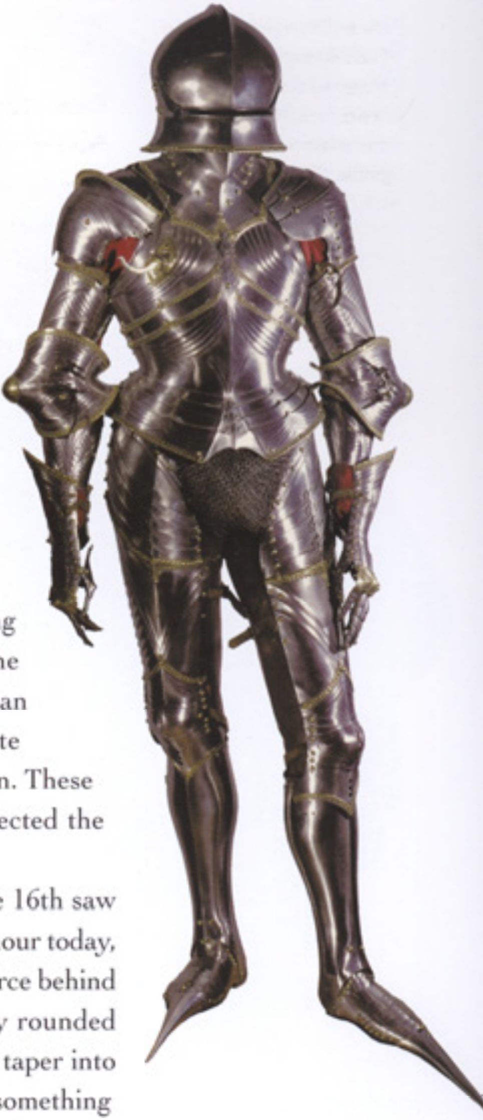
The mid- to late 15th century saw another dramatic change in the development of armour. Until this point armour styles had been fairly international, with only occasional and minor variations in form, often just a case of one region being ahead of the fashion trend rather than developing anything uniquely different. Now, however, two distinctive styles developed: the 'gothic' style of the armourers of southern Germany and the 'Milanese' style from the workshops of, unsurprisingly, Milan. Gothic armour was dominated by narrow and wasp-waisted armour, with relatively small plates, heavily fluted and scalloped, in a manner similar to the high gothic architecture with which it shares its name. Emphasizing flexibility over protection, it still relied on mail gussets sewn to the arming doublet, the reinforced jacket to which the leg and arm assemblies were tied, to protect the armpit and a mail skirt or mail *braies* – underpants made of tiny mail links – to protect the groin. By contrast the Milanese style made use of larger plates, smooth and rounded, giving the harness a much more massive look. This afforded perhaps greater protection at a slight cost in flexibility particularly with regard to the shoulders. In both cases the armour was often asymmetrical, with larger plates or additional layers of protection (the *gardbrace* or *grande-garde*) shielding the left side of the body, the side most likely to receive a lance blow.

In this period there was a broader range of helmet styles than perhaps ever before. To a certain extent these can be matched with the two dominant styles of armour: the *sallet*, horizontal, skimming the jaw line and with a clear and distinct tail, reflects the narrow lines and fluted style of the gothic style whilst the Milanese armour is more often depicted in conjunction with an *armet*, a bascinet-style helmet that enclosed the head with large cheek pieces that met in the middle to protect the jaw and a hinged visor for the face. Some also had a disc of steel at the nape of the neck – the rondel – the purpose of which is no longer clear. Another popular Italianate style was the *barbute*, a deep helmet with an open face reminiscent of the classical



St George from an altarpiece c.1391. The saint is depicted in the latest armour, including plate defences for the arms and legs, and the ubiquitous 'hounskull' bascinet. His bulbous breastplate and the full sleeves of his *jupon* mimic contemporary civilian fashions. (Bridgeman Art Library)





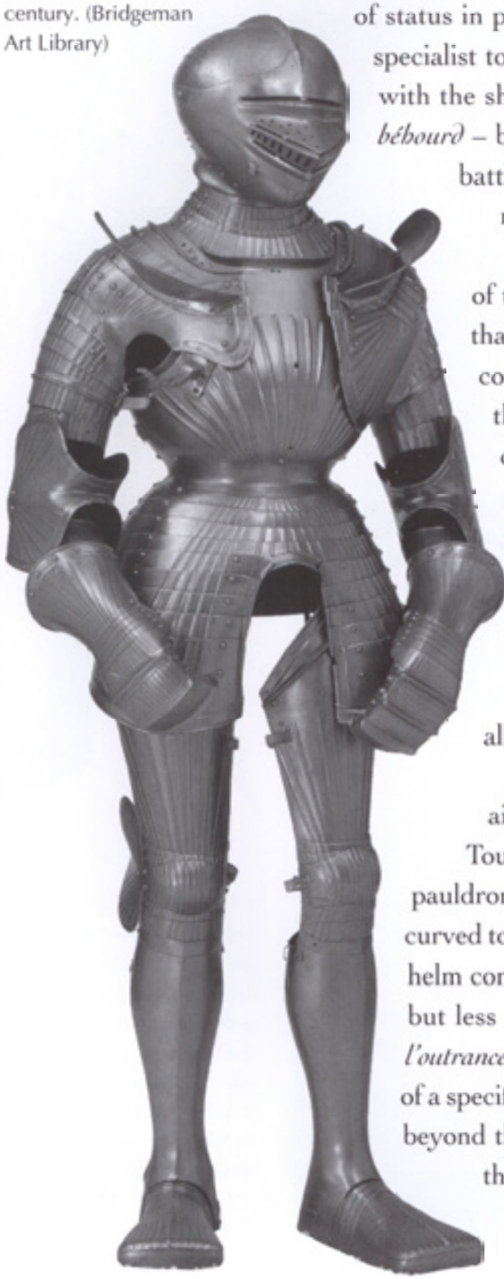
Greek Corinthian helmet. Sallets could take a very similar form, forgoing the sweeping tail in favour of a deeper more close-fitting shape. The ubiquitous kettle hat, which had first appeared in the late 12th century, can also frequently be seen in depictions of knightly combatants in this late period, some of them being very deep with eye-slits at the base of the crown. These were worn, like the sallet, with a plate *bevor*, a shaped defence that protected the neck and face from collarbone to chin.

Although gothic and Milanese armour dominated the 15th century, the 16th saw a new style emerge that mixed elements of both. Known as 'Maximilian' armour today, named after the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I who was the driving force behind the German armour industry which produced it, it was characterized by rounded plates decorated with lines of fluting, and a boxy breastplate with a sharp taper into a wasp waist. As well as drawing on preceding armour styles it reflected something of the puffed and heavily pleated clothing of the period: the narrow-waisted coats with large flared and pleated skirts and broad-toed shoes. This style became hugely popular, in no small part because of the dominance of the Hapsburg dynasty, and was widely copied, most notably by Henry VIII's Greenwich workshops, which he set up by bringing German armourers to England.

Through the 16th and into the 17th century plate armour continued to develop, although stylistically it did not change as dramatically as in previous centuries. One of the major changes was the development of garnitures, collections of armour with interchangeable elements so that the same armour could be used for combat on foot, as light cavalry, in tournaments and so forth simply by replacing one or two pieces.

15th-century gothic and Milanese harness. Whilst the insect-like lines, low-crowned *sallet* and long pointed sabatons typify the German gothic (above), the Milanese armour (top left) was much more massive, trading flexibility for protection. (Mary Evans Picture Library (above) and (top left) the Art Archive)

TOURNAMENT ARMOUR

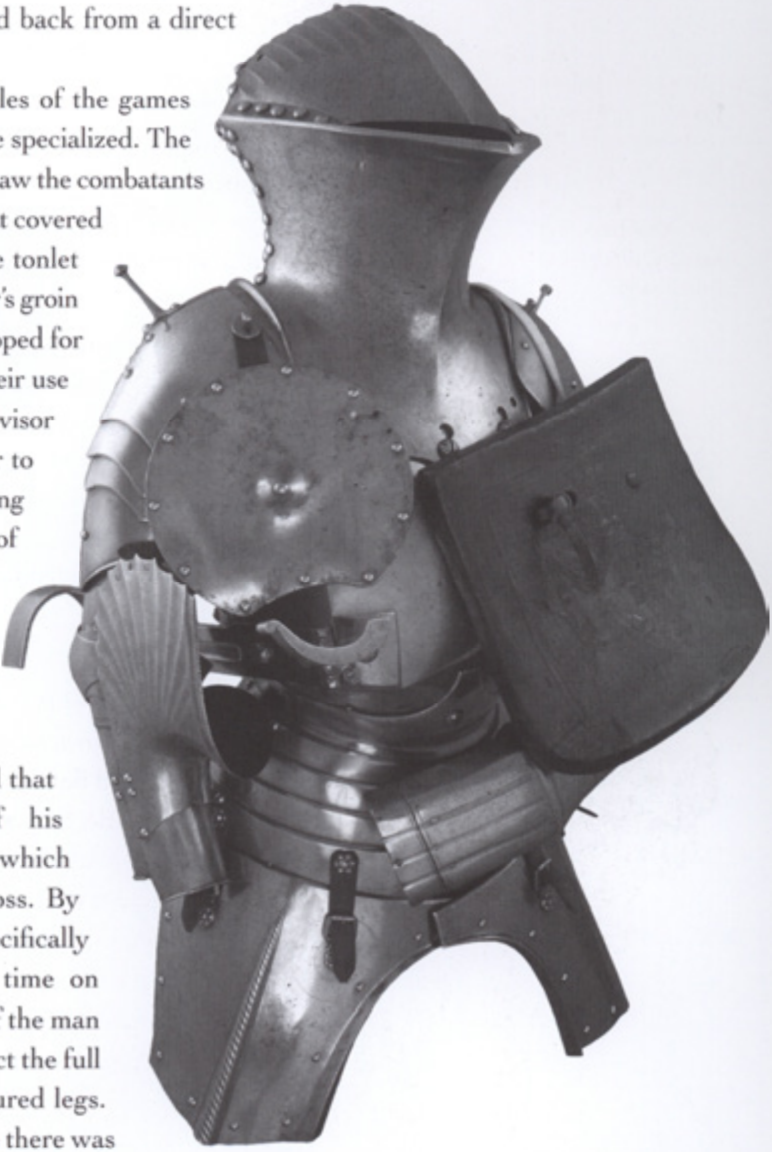


Maximilian plate armour. Combining both the larger plates of the Milanese system and the fluting and wasp-waist of the gothic, the Maximilian style would dominate throughout the 16th century. (Bridgeman Art Library)

In modern studies medieval and Renaissance armour is usually divided into three types: battlefield harness, the workaday (but not necessarily plain) armour worn in war; parade armour, seen as a 16th-century development of armour as an art form whose intricate and often fantastical decoration rendered it impractical and fit only for displays of status in pageant and parade; and tournament armour. The development of specialist tournament armour came about in the mid-13th century, coinciding with the shift in tournament style from the mass brawl of the early *mêlée* or *béhourd* – both free-form tourneys which had little to distinguish them from battles except the presence of an audience – towards a more tightly regulated series of games dominated by the individual joust. As the tournament became more of a sport and less like the mass combat of the battle it became much easier to anticipate the parts of the body that were most likely to be hit and to increase the amounts of armour covering those particular areas. Furthermore the one-on-one nature of the joust meant that the combatant's range of movement and vision could be sacrificed in order to provide greater protection; the knight charging down his foe across a tilt barrier did not need the peripheral vision and flexibility of movement that was required in the press of open battle, but he did need far greater protection over his left-hand side from the chest to the face. Some of the earliest references to breastplates specify them as being for the joust where they are worn as additional protection over a pair of plates. This development also allowed the creation of the *arrêt de la cuirasse*, a bracket fastened to the breastplate on which the knight could rest his lance to get a steadier aim and a truer strike.

Tournament armour designed specifically for the joust had far larger left pauldrons, later reinforced by the even more massive *gardbrace*, which also curved to deflect the lance from rising up onto the neck or the head. The great helm continued to be used for jousts of peace long after the more functional but less easy to decorate bascinet had been adopted for war and jousts *à l'outrance* (literally 'to the utmost'). The late 14th century saw the development of a specific tournament helm, whose massive curving lower half jutting out far beyond the shallow-bowled crown helped to deflect lance blows away from the single eye-slit, giving it its 'frog-mouthed' appearance. This large helmet incorporated neck protection, resting on the shoulders and being fastened to the breastplate by hasps or thongs, which stopped the wearer's head from being snapped back from a direct lance blow.

In the late 15th and 16th centuries the rules of the games became even more refined and the armour more specialized. The 15th-century German *Bundrennen*, for example, saw the combatants unarmoured except for a single shaped plate that covered the chest, neck and face. Tonlet armours – the tonlet being a wide steel skirt that protected the warrior's groin whilst allowing full leg movement – were developed for one-to-one foot combats in the 16th century; their use was often combined with a globular helmet, the visor of which was pierced with many holes in order to maximize visibility and ventilation without offering an opening for either sword-point or the pick of a pollaxe.

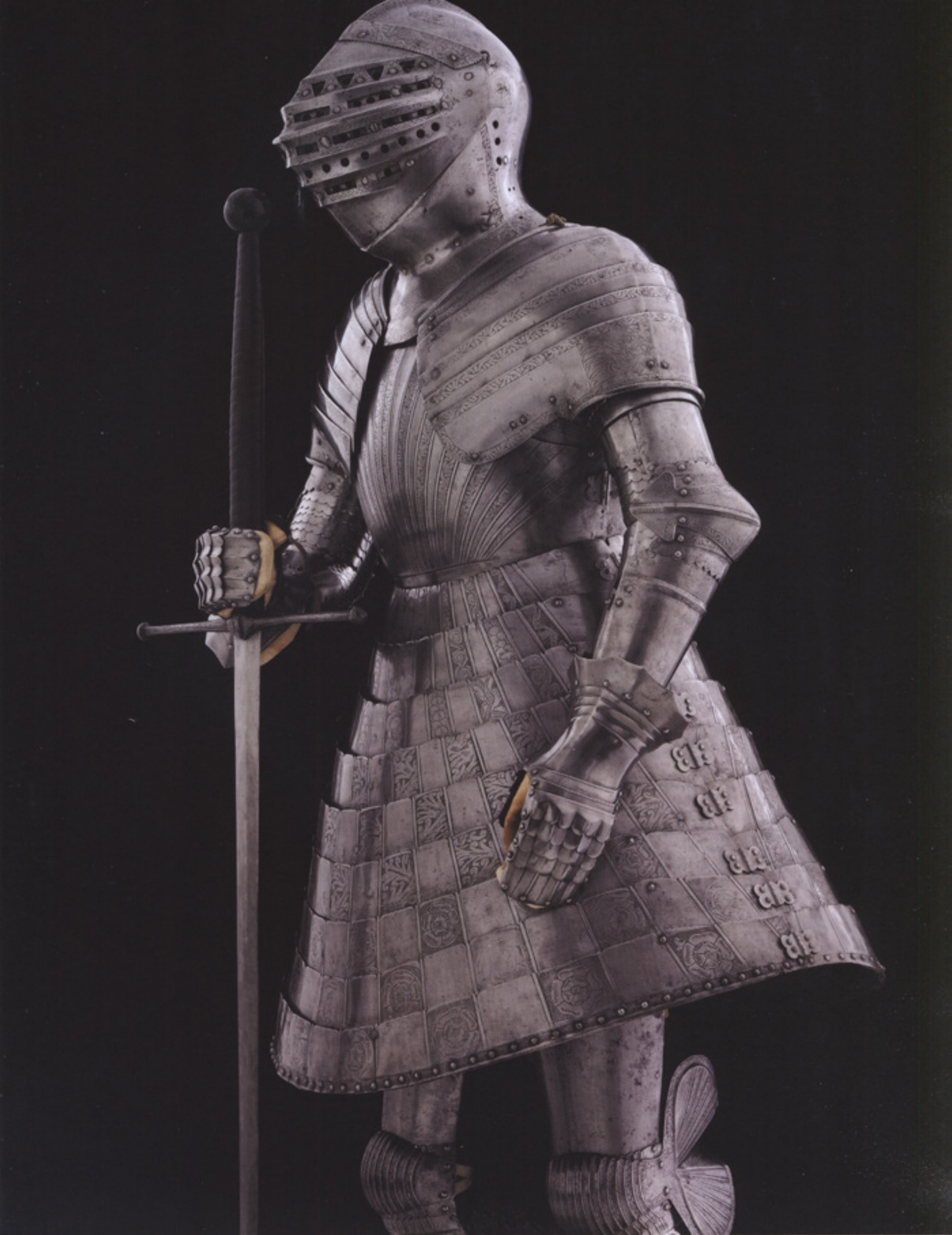


SHIELDS

The knight of the 11th century carried a shield that was very different from the shield of his Scandinavian and Carolingian predecessors, which was large and round, with a central steel boss. By contrast, the Norman shield was designed specifically for a man who spent the majority of his time on horseback; it was kite-shaped and the length of the man from shoulder to ankle, since it needed to protect the full length of his body and especially his unarmoured legs. As these became encased in mail and then plate there was no longer a need for such a long shield and it began to shrink so that by the mid-13th century it had taken on the archetypal 'heater' shape, a Victorian name bestowed because it resembled the base of a flat-iron. This was sufficiently large to be able to cover the area most vulnerable to a lance strike but also manoeuvrable enough to be used to deflect blows over much of the body.

The construction of shields remained the same throughout the period. Individual planks of timber, usually lime or pine which offered the best combination of lightness and protection and were the materials of choice for the making of shields in the Viking period, were nailed together and covered in a layer of parchment or leather ready for

Jousting armour for the German competiton of the '*Hohenzeuggestech*', c.1500–20. As the joust became a more structured and regulated sport, so the armour worn became much more specialized. (Bridgeman Art Library)



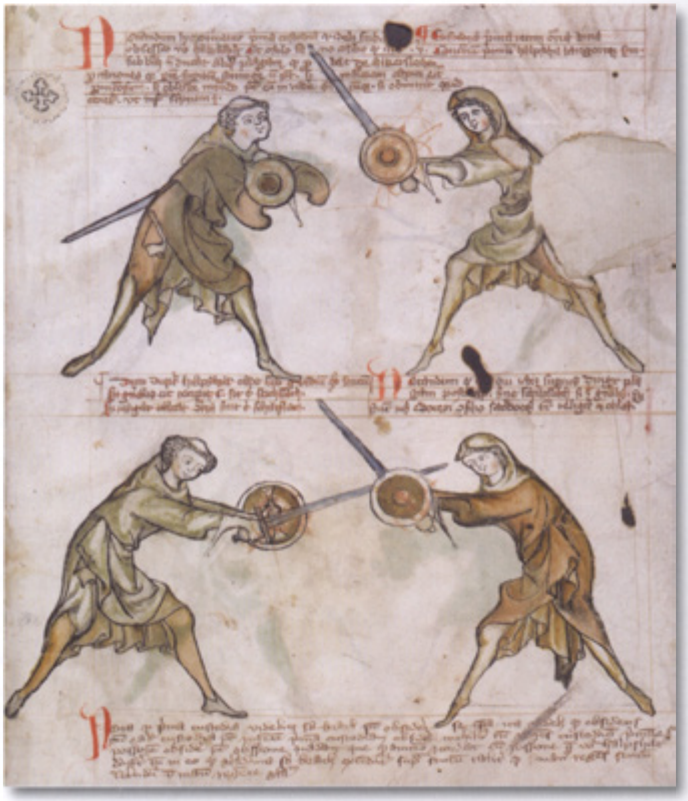
decorating. The shield was held by *enarmes*, straps through which the left arm passed, and a *guige*, a longer strap going over the head and shoulder that took some of the shield's weight. The heads of the rivets which fixed these straps to the shield may be what have been interpreted as decorative rondels on some 11th-century depictions of shields, such as those in the Bayeux Tapestry, although the positions of these dots do not always correspond to the logical position of the straps.

By the end of the 14th century the coverage and protection afforded by plate armour made the shield an encumbrance and it was rarely carried after 1400, except in the tournament where it continued to be a part of the scoring system. Even there the shield was reduced in size, becoming little more than an aiming point directly attached to the left side of the tourneyer's breastplate.

Another form of shield, however, continued in use until the 17th century. First appearing in the latter half of the 12th century the buckler was a small circular shield around a foot in diameter, with a domed boss in its centre. It might be wholly metal or made of a wooden and leather body with a metal boss, and was held in the fist by a single bar grip. Being too small to stop a blow directly, its primary use was as a means of deflecting them and protecting the wielder's sword hand. The oldest surviving *Fechtbuch*, or fighting manual – dating to around 1300, and known as the Tower manuscript, or by its accession number within the Royal Armouries collection, I.33 – shows it also being used aggressively to strike the opponent's hands or punched directly into his face.

The figures depicted in the text using the sword and buckler are a monk, a scholar and a woman. Whilst it would be wrong to take the illustrations literally (some observers have created fantastic stories that the monk is a real figure, a retired knight turned warrior monk: a tale that owes more to Eastern martial arts traditions and the novelist Ellis Peters than to medieval European society and culture) their appearance does suggest that this weapon combination had a civilian context. This is reinforced by the fact that in the 16th century the buckler became something of a fashion accessory for the apprentices of England.

Opposite: Tonlet armour of Henry VIII, c.1520. Another form of specialist tournament armour, the flared skirt, or 'tonlet', of this harness, made by the English workshop at Greenwich, also copies the gowns worn during the period. (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.7)



Below: Men fighting with sword and buckler from manuscript I.33. This is the earliest surviving *Fechtbuch*, or combat manual, dating to the end of the 13th century. (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, I.33)

THE SWORD

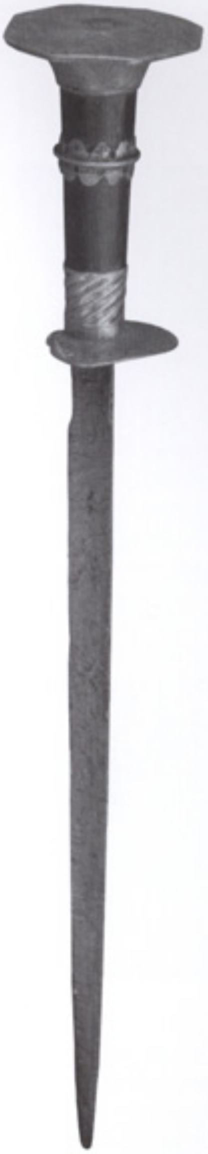
The sword is the classical knightly weapon. It had huge symbolic significance for the knight as well as being a weapon of personal defence. In part this was because its cruciform shape readily lent itself to incorporation in the iconography of an increasingly spiritual knighthood, but it was also a continuation of the weapon's importance within early medieval warrior cultures. Up until the ninth century swords were rare objects; they are found in only 11 per cent of Anglo-Saxon graves and only around 20 per cent of those warrior graves excavated in Jutland and southern Sweden, for example, whilst spearheads appear in almost all. Surviving examples of complete swords or, more commonly, pommels and crosses (often referred to by the anachronistic term 'quillons') are almost invariably decorated with precious metal and intricate patterning, marking them as objects of high status. This is also borne out in the stories that come down to us in tales such as *Beowulf* or the later Norse sagas. Here heroes carry swords which have pedigrees longer than the warriors who wield them. They were passed down from generation to generation, father to son, or reclaimed from the burial mounds of long-dead heroes to be used again, such as the sword named Skofnung stolen by the hero Skeggi of Midfirth from the grave of Hrolf Kraki, who had been dead and buried some 400 years. Such swords retained something of the luck and prowess of their former owners. Their blades were a thing of mysticism forged with all of the magic of the smith. Whilst the number of surviving swords dramatically increases from the Viking period of the tenth century onwards and the level of ornamentation declines overall, it is clear that something of that pre-Christian mystique survived in the medieval knight's relationship with his blade.

Charting the changes and developments in the forms of swords is if anything even more complex a problem than charting that of armour. Not only are there all the same difficulties in dating, but the stylistic differences between swords of different periods are much less distinctive than between armours. Added to this is the fact that the sword was made of distinct pieces – the blade, the cross and the pommel – each of which could be replaced independently of the other parts. A good sword blade might be kept and re-hilted to match with the latest fashions or a new owner's whim. Thus the so-called sword of Charlemagne, now residing in the Louvre, Paris, has a pommel and cross that appears to be of the ninth century, and therefore might be contemporary with the Frankish emperor's reign, but the blade is of a 13th-century form, whilst the scabbard and other fittings are from the 19th century, replaced when Napoleon Bonaparte chose to use the sword as part of his coronation regalia. Similar, if less dramatic alterations have been recognized in other surviving medieval weapons, and there may be others which cannot be recognized because the use of some forms of blade and hilt span centuries.*

It is possible to suggest, albeit tentatively, that swords of the 11th and 12th centuries developed out of those of the preceding Viking era, having broad, flat blades that tapered gently and terminated in a round point, and short, single-handed grips. In the 13th century the longer 'great sword' or 'war sword' appeared, whose blade, whilst of the same cross-section as earlier forms, was much longer, as was the grip, which enabled it to be used with the left hand 'steering' the sword from the pommel and the right providing the power at the grip. This distinction between the larger 'great sword' and the smaller 'arming sword' would continue throughout the rest of the middle ages and into the early Renaissance. Whilst swords of this period were well-balanced for both cut and thrust, prior to the mid-14th century their blade form made them more of a cutting weapon than a thrusting one.

Some time around 1350 a new blade form developed. Longer, narrower and stiffer, with diamond or hexagonal cross-section, there can be little doubt that this new form was designed in response to the increased use of plate armour. Although many studies suggest that these blade forms were designed to penetrate armour, the 15th-century treatises on longsword fighting, or *Fechtbücher*, show that in fact the main techniques used against armoured opponents were performed at 'half sword', with the left hand grasping the sword at the mid-point of the blade so that the point could be thrust into the relatively unprotected armpit or groin, or into the eye-slit or between the helm and the bevor.

Although not normally considered a knightly weapon the *falchion* is occasionally seen in the hands of knights in contemporary illustrations. Shorter than the 'knightly' sword, single-edged and very broad bladed, widening out to a flat end like a modern machete or with a cutback on the back edge, the weapon had a fearsome cutting power. Again the *Fechtbücher* show men fighting with these *Grossmesser* (literally 'big knives'), losing hands to the cleaving blows of their opponents. The fight-master Hans Talhoffer, active between around 1430 and 1460, introduces the section on *Messer* fighting in his manual with the words 'Now they fight with messers, God help them!'



A rondel dagger. The quintessential military knife of the later middle ages, its narrow and stiffened blade, combined with the large disc pommel, were all aimed at making it easy to thrust through a visor or the gaps between plates. (Bridgeman Art Library)

Knives were carried by all classes in the middle ages, as much as a tool and eating implement as for defence. The *seax*, the single-edged knife of the Saxon and Norse world, fell out of use by the end of the 12th century. From then onwards the most common style was the so-called 'bollock' dagger (re-named by the sensitive Victorians as the 'ballock' or 'kidney' dagger), named for the bulges at the base of

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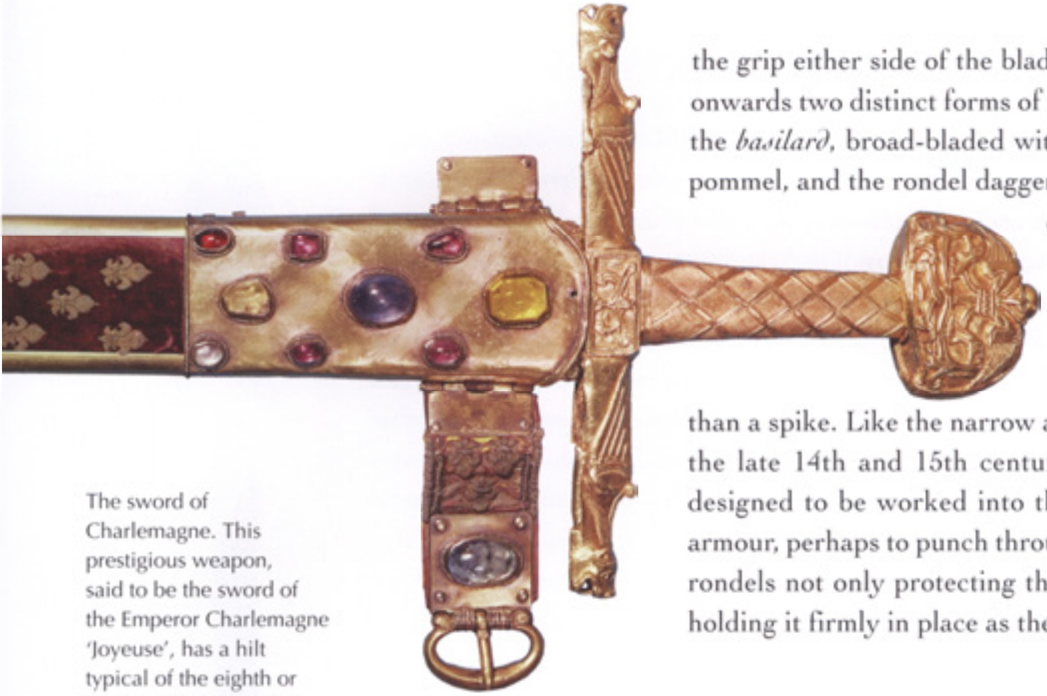
* The best and definitive work on this must be Ewart Oakeshott's *Record of the Medieval Sword* (Woodbridge, 1991). His typology offers 22 classifications of sword based on blade, cross and pommel forms.

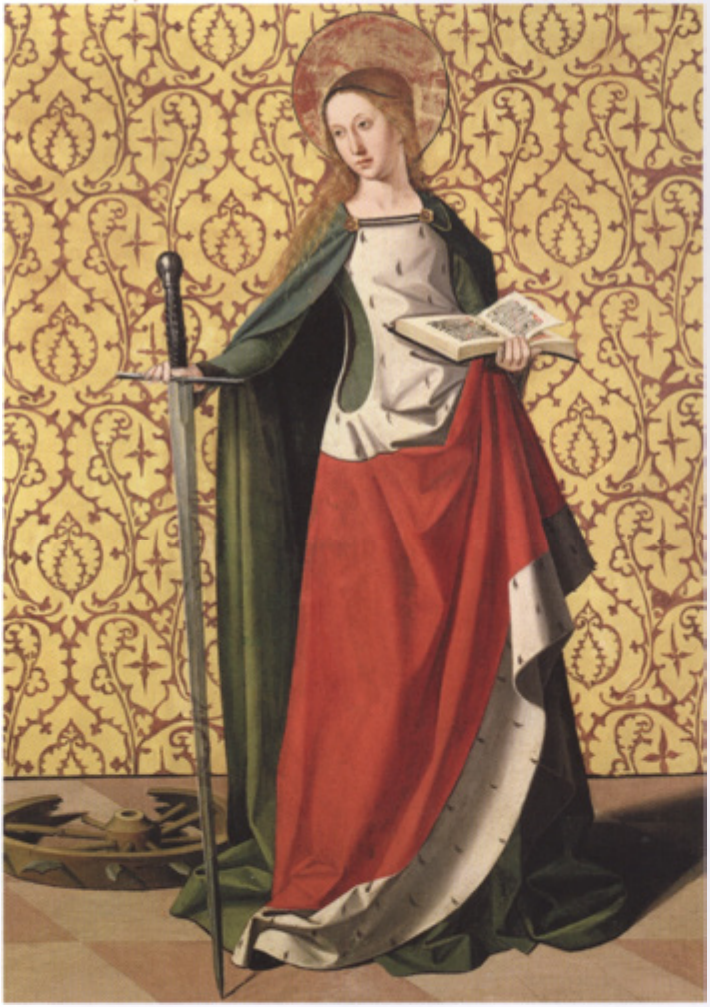


The sword of Charlemagne. This prestigious weapon, said to be the sword of the Emperor Charlemagne 'Joyeuse', has a hilt typical of the eighth or ninth century. Its blade, scabbard and fittings are much later, however. It is now kept in the Louvre, Paris. (Bridgeman Art Library)

the grip either side of the blade. From the 14th century onwards two distinct forms of military dagger appeared; the *basilard*, broad-bladed with a sword-like cross and pommel, and the rondel dagger, named for the two discs either side of the grip. The blades of this latter type were invariably narrow, often triangular in section, some little more than a spike. Like the narrow and stiff-bladed swords of the late 14th and 15th centuries these weapons were designed to be worked into the gaps in an opponent's armour, perhaps to punch through the thinner plates, the rondels not only protecting the wielder's hand but also holding it firmly in place as the blade was driven home.

THE LANCE

The other quintessential weapon of the medieval knight is the lance. Lances of the 11th century were indistinguishable from spears, equally capable of being used on foot as on horseback and even thrown in the manner of a javelin, as is shown in the Bayeux Tapestry. The Tapestry also depicts one of the Norman horsemen 'couching' his spear, tucking it beneath his arm to stabilize it and focus the energy of the charge and mass of horse and rider into its point. This is perhaps the first depiction of this tactic. By 1100 it was the norm for knightly cavalry and the lance had changed as a response. These changes are difficult to perceive – visual sources almost invariably depict the lance either as a straight shaft of two parallel lines or by a single line; however it is clear that almost immediately the lance became longer, a necessity given the way in which it was now being used. An indication of this comes through in our narrative sources. In Wace's *Roman de Brut*, a fictional history of the origins of Britain written around 1150, the brothers Belin, king of England, and Brenne, duke of Burgundy, faced a besieging Roman army by dismounting and cutting their lances in half. Such actions are recorded as a matter of course after this point, which must suggest that lances had become longer than the spear used by an infantryman. From illustrations it can be estimated that the lance of the 13th century onwards was around 14 feet in length. By the 15th century depictions of lances that were flared and tapered towards the tip appear in the pictorial record, a means by which the lance could be made stronger without a huge increase in weight. The development of the *vamplate*, a conical dish of metal that protected the wielder's hand, may, like the development of the arrêt, have had some use in battle, but would appear to be first and foremost a development for the tournament.



St Catherine bearing the symbols of her martyrdom, 15th century. The sword the saint holds is typical of the hand-and-a-half swords in use during this period, with long stiff blades designed for thrusting. (Getty Images)

OTHER *MÊLÉE* WEAPONS

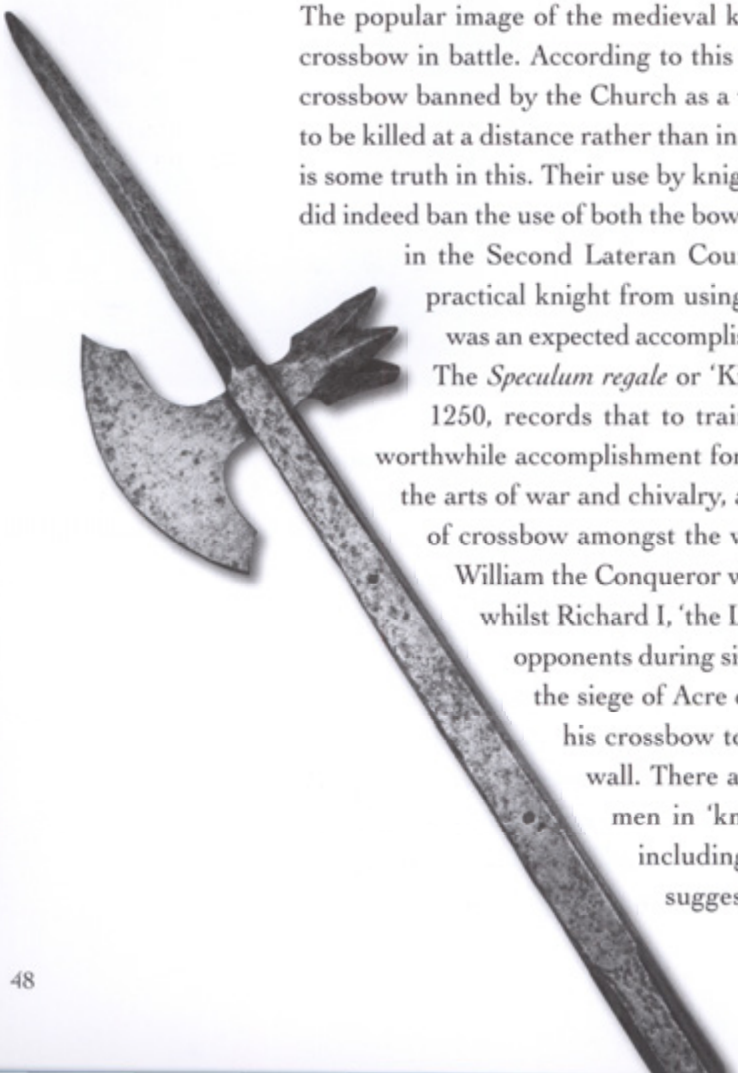
Besides the sword and cut-down lance a wide variety of other hand weapons were also available to the medieval knight fighting on foot. The long-hafted axe, traditionally seen as a Norse or Anglo-Saxon weapon, was used in the 11th and 12th centuries. At the climax of the battle of Lincoln in 1141, fought during the civil war between King Stephen and Matilda, the daughter of Henry I, Stephen stood 'like a lion' fending off his enemies with just such an axe. By the 14th century the dominant weapon was some form of hafted weapon that had evolved out of farming tools. Although there was nothing to bar his use of the halberd, bill or spear, the 15th-century man-at-arms' weapon of choice was the pollaxe. Mounted on a haft between 5 and 6 feet long, shod and topped with a steel spike, the head comprised a hammer, often spiked like a modern meat tenderizer, opposite either a small axe blade or a curved pick. Such a weapon was to all intents and purposes a can opener, each blade, spike and face designed to crush or pierce armour plate.

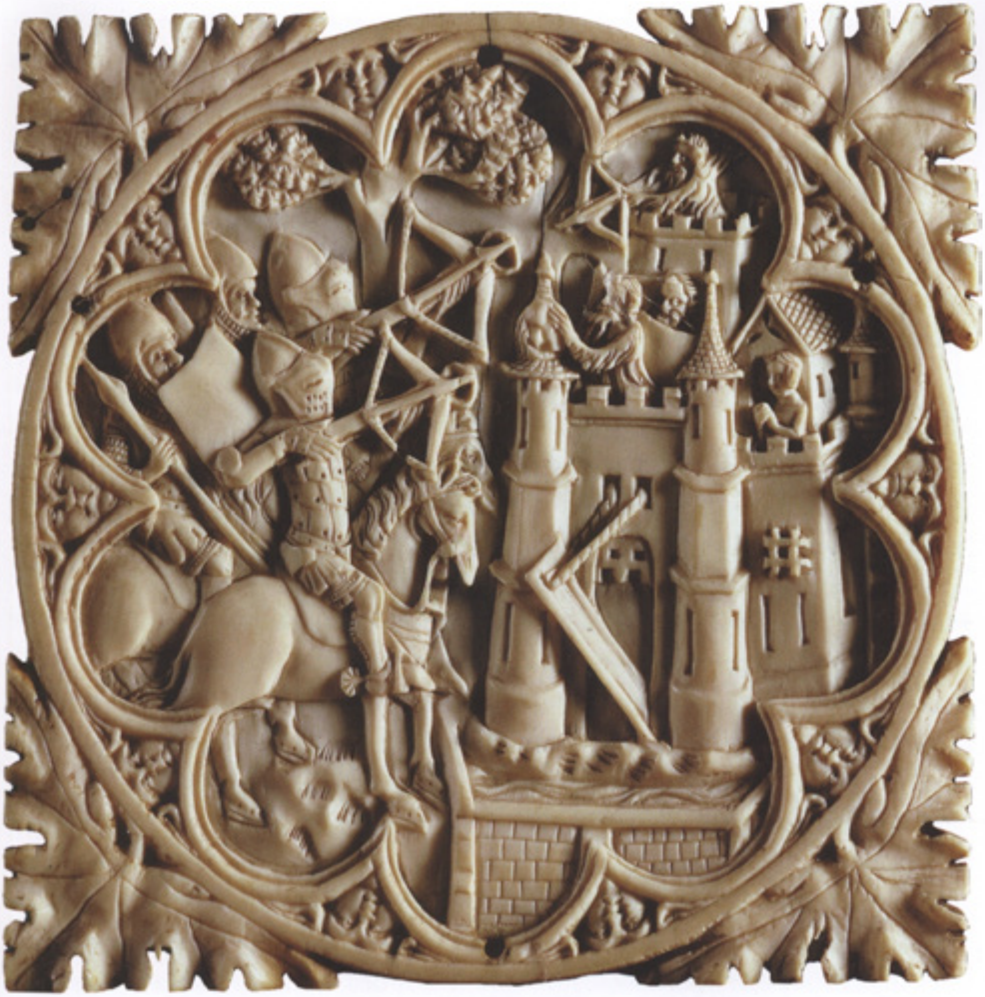
As well as these long hafted weapons, shorter ones weighted for wielding in one hand from horseback were common. The flanged mace served a similar function, the 'blades' designed to crush plates. Maces of some form had been used since the 11th century; the Bayeux Tapestry shows tri-lobed objects with short handles being thrown, but the rough-hewn clubs (*baculae*) carried by Count William and Bishop Odo are more likely to be symbols of rank and status than actual weapons. A more popular alternative in the 15th century was the warhammer, a miniature version of the pollaxe that could be wielded in one hand. It continued beyond our period, still being in use in the 17th century.

One of the more outlandish examples of a hand weapon comes from William of Tyre's narrative of the First Crusade. He describes a German knight, 'big and strong' who carried in two hands 'a flail, which was made of a staff shod in iron, three feet long, on the end of which was a chain of two feet at the end of which was an iron ball with six points the size of a man's fist'. Although the spiked ball and chain are a staple of popular images of the knight, this is one of very few contemporary descriptions of such a weapon, and the detail to which William of Tyre goes would suggest that it was a very unusual weapon indeed.

BOWS AND CROSSBOWS

The popular image of the medieval knight does not include him using the bow or crossbow in battle. According to this view they were shunned as unchivalrous, the crossbow banned by the Church as a weapon of the Devil because it enabled a man to be killed at a distance rather than in brave and manly hand-to-hand combat. There is some truth in this. Their use by knights in pitched battle was rare, and the Church did indeed ban the use of both the bow and crossbow in war against fellow Christians in the Second Lateran Council of 1139, but this did not stop the ever-practical knight from using them on occasion. Proficiency with the bow was an expected accomplishment for the aristocracy, practised in hunting. The *Speculum regale* or 'King's Mirror', a Norwegian treatise of around 1250, records that to train with the bow, javelin and slingshot was a worthwhile accomplishment for those who would be thoroughly proficient in the arts of war and chivalry, and includes the 'horn bow' and a weaker sort of crossbow amongst the weapons the warrior might use on horseback. William the Conqueror was said to own a bow that only he could draw, whilst Richard I, 'the Lionheart', was not averse to taking pot shots at opponents during sieges, and was carried out on his sickbed during the siege of Acre during the Third Crusade so that he could use his crossbow to pick off men who showed themselves at the wall. There are also a significant number of illustrations of men in 'knightly' armour shooting bows or crossbows including a number doing so on horseback, which suggests it might not have been such an unusual





Knights using crossbows, from around 1390. This 'siege of the castle of love' might be allegorical, but there are numerous contemporary images of mounted knights using both bow and crossbow in chronicles and manuscripts, suggesting it may not have been as unusual as historians have assumed. (The Art Archive)

Opposite: A 15th-century pollaxe. This was the weapon of choice for the dismounted knight and man-at-arms of the 15th century, another tool specifically crafted for splitting, piercing or smashing the armour plate of an opponent. (Bridgeman Art Library)

occurrence. That said, it must be remembered that the culture of the medieval knight, like many warrior cultures, was based upon prowess won by physical force. As such, whilst the knight might pragmatically use a bow or crossbow at a siege or in battle, there was a cultural barrier to its becoming a regular weapon within his arsenal.

TOURNAMENT WEAPONS

Unlike the specialization of armour there were fewer specialized weapons designed specifically for tournaments, but with the growing distinction between friendlier tournaments *à plaisance* and the more earnest *à l'outrance*, the former saw the use of blunted swords and lances tipped with 'coronels' – blunt heads which replaced the normal sharp points. Some tournaments and most *béhourds* might be fought with wooden clubs or weapons made of *cuir bouilli* or whalebone. In the German tournament known as the *Hohenzeuggestech*, knights scored points for splintering lances, so special ones were designed to shatter on impact, much as those in modern tournament shows. Otherwise the weapons were much the same as those used for open battle; foot combats might take place using pollaxes, spears or swords. *Pas d'armes*, organized challenges often fought *à l'outrance* during lulls in military campaigns, were frequently arranged to comprise a series of engagements with different weapons, with a set number of blows being struck with each.

THE SELECTION OF WEAPONS AND ARMOUR

From this whistle-stop tour there appears to be a clear development in both arms and armour, resulting from improvements in iron and steel that allowed the development both of ever more complex plates and of weapons designed specifically to beat them. It would be wrong, however, to think that there was a single linear trend in the development of arms and armour across the whole of Western Europe. There were both regional and personal variations, with a variety of factors involved in making the choice.

Regional styles played a not-insignificant role, particularly in the 15th century. Although the arms industry was trans-national, with major centres of production such as Chartres (for mail armour), Passau (for sword blades), Milan and Augsburg exporting to clients across Europe, it is clear from the source material that at various times certain areas had styles that were particular to them. Frustratingly, however, all too often our sources provide no detail as to what that distinction might be.

Climate may have had some impact upon these regional developments, since the armour worn in the Spanish and Mediterranean states tended to be lighter than that worn elsewhere in Europe. However there is surprisingly little evidence to suggest that the crusading knights made concessions for the heat of the Middle East. It has been suggested that the adoption of surcoats at the beginning of the 12th century may have been the crusaders' attempt at covering armour from the sun, but it is also possible that it was an extra medium of display adopted for the tournament, which was becoming hugely popular at this time. One example we do have comes from the eyewitness account of Louis IX's crusade to Egypt in 1250, by the knight Jean de Joinville who served on the campaign. During a lull in the fighting at Mansourah

Joinville persuaded the king to remove his helmet and wear instead Joinville's steel cap 'so that he might have some air'. The lighter armour seen around the Mediterranean and in the Iberian peninsula might also reflect another factor: the weapons they expected to face. In the north, where the lance and crossbow were king, there was a greater need for protection than in Spain, where the opponents were more likely to use less powerful javelins and slings.

In his works describing Wales and Ireland, written around 1189, Gerald of Wales highlights another important factor. Contrasting warfare on mainland Europe with the experience of fighting the Welsh and Irish he notes that in France 'heavy armour is a mark of distinction, here it is only a burden'. Heavy armour, he says, is wholly inappropriate when engaging an enemy who fights in broken terrain and employs hit and run tactics. 'Lightly armoured men ... should be used against an enemy who is lightly armoured and mobile, and who chooses to fight over rough terrain.' Full armour was not always the most appropriate for the duties the knight might be asked to perform. In the biography of the Anglo-Norman knight William Marshal we are told how William and four companions go off to scout the French army's line of attack, during Henry I's campaign against the French in 1189. Because their task requires mobility, 'whether to chase the enemy or rescue their own men' they go out in their 'light armour'. The following day, with the French army closing on him, Henry II rides out of Le Mans unarmed to look at them himself. William is already fully armoured and Henry tells him to disarm. William refuses stating that 'an unarmed man cannot last out in a crisis or grave situation, and we don't know what their intention will be'. Henry leaves William behind, but is caught by the French and William has to come to the rescue. Of course the anecdote is framed in such a way that William is seen as the intelligent and savvy warrior, the hero who rescues his king, but it also reflects something of the practical decisions that had to be made. Armour could be an intolerable burden: Joinville tells of being awakened by a night attack after Mansourah and putting on his aketon because his wounds left him unable to bear the weight of his mail hauberk.

It is even more difficult to determine why knights chose a particular hand weapon in preference to another. Just as a golfer has a favourite set of clubs or a craftsman his closely guarded tools, the warrior must have found swords, spears or pollaxes that suited his physique and style of fighting. That said, and as we shall see in the next chapter when we look at the tactics and training of the knightly class, the ideal was that he be competent with a range of weapons including, by the 15th century, dagger, sword, lance and some form of hafted weapon.

Not all of the factors behind the choice of arms and armour were necessarily practical ones. Throughout the period there was a clear link between the knight's possession of arms and armour and his social standing and status. Chroniclers often refer to knights as

THE SHOCK OF THE NEW? THE FIRST CRUSADE

When in March of 1095 Pope Urban II made a speech to an assembly of French nobility and clergy at Clermont, in which he explained that the Christians in the East, both Catholic and Orthodox, were facing daily attacks and depredations from the Muslim population and lords, and offered those who would unite against this common foe remission of their sins, few could have expected the huge impact that his words would have on both East and West.

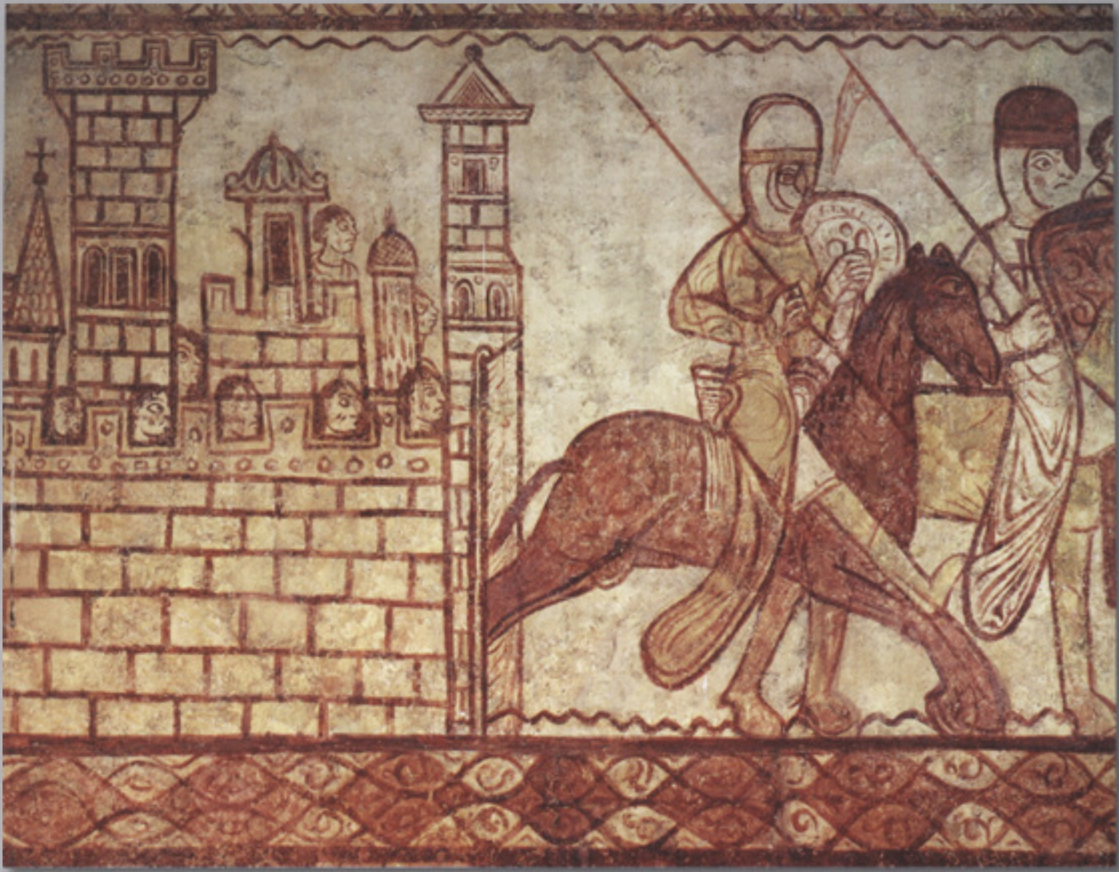
The response was enormous. Apart from the 30,000 untrained and ill-prepared followers of Peter the Hermit's Peasants' Crusade, who were the first to arrive in the Holy Land and were quickly destroyed by the Seljuk Turks, forces were gathered from the lordships of northern France, Italy and Germany – maybe 35,000, with some 5,000 knights.

But whilst the number of those who took up the cross was a shock to all, not least the Byzantines whom they were ostensibly there to support, they were not wholly unknown to the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. Normans had entered southern Italy as part of the armies of the northern Lombards around 1000, and had fought for and against the Byzantine emperor for almost a century. In 1081 Normans under Robert Guiscard had defeated his forces at the battle of Dyrrachium, as they carved out a kingdom in southern Italy and the Balkans.

The knights by whom they were defeated at Dyrrachium and who they saw cross their territory on their way to Jerusalem left a lasting impression on the Byzantines. 'A Frank on horseback is invincible, and would even make a hole in the walls of Babylon,' wrote Anna Comnena, the emperor's daughter. His armour made him invincible and his initial charge was unstoppable. But she and her father were also aware of his weaknesses. It was essential to target his horse with arrows, since 'directly he gets off his horse, anyone who likes can make sport of him'. The knight was also rash in battle and quick to pursue. After the initial charge knights were disorganized and weak.

Their leaders were as fickle and impetuous as their knights. Unlike the commanders of Byzantine armies who were generals steeped in the traditions of classical military learning, men like Godfrey de Bouillon, Bohemond of Taranto and Raymond de St Gilles – three of the key commanders – were war leaders, as much the warrior as their men. Arrogant and wilful, they were divided by personal animosities and pride. 'So many and such great disputes arose between the leaders of our army,' writes the crusader Raymond of Aguilers, 'that almost the whole army was divided.' With no clear secular leader it was only the Pope's representative, Bishop Adhemar, who held the forces together, and even he was unable to stop some from setting off alone, such as Baldwin of Boulogne, who went on to establish the County of Edessa, or Stephen of Blois, who left the crusade and returned home.

The victories of the First Crusade, with its capture of Jerusalem, cannot, in fact, be put down to the power and effectiveness of the heavy cavalry. Whilst the knights' charges were important in their winning of the battles of Dorylaeum and Ascalon, it was the capture of Antioch and Jerusalem by siege that secured the crusade's success. Victory came as a result of the disunity of the Islamic world, divided on ethnic and religious grounds between the Seljuk



12th-century knights, wearing the crusaders' cross on their surcoats, ride out from a fortified town in this contemporary fresco. (The Art Archive)

Turks and the Fatimid Egyptians, the individual cities commanded by semi-independent governors who knew they could not rely on their respective lords for help. It came through the support of the Byzantines from whose territory supplies and intelligence arrived. Antioch had fallen by luck, when a tower captain betrayed the town. The belief of the crusaders that they were doing God's work was also a major factor. The miraculous discovery of the Holy Lance during the army's time besieged in Antioch became a focus of morale, even if not everyone believed in its authenticity. As the sieges dragged on, it was the exhortations of Adhemar and the priests, with their days of fasting and processions, as much as the charisma of their military commanders, that inspired the crusaders to victory.

The success of the First Crusade had huge implications for the development of the medieval knight. In the crusading ideal the Church arguably found the key to reconciling the knightly desire for prowess with the Church's concepts of 'just war' and the Peace of God. Whilst it would not stop warfare between Christians, and became as much a political tool as an ideological one, crusading established itself deep within the psyche of knighthood, shaping chivalry into a more pious and spiritual ethos.

loricati and *armati*, 'mail-clad' or 'armoured' men, making this connection clear. As we have seen, Gerald of Wales notes that in mainland Europe armour is 'a mark of distinction'. In the romance and epic tales, the quality and virtue of the hero is represented by the quality and decoration of his armour. In the tale of *Erec and Enide*, when the Arthurian hero Erec is about to ride out to defeat a haughty opponent and claim a prize for his love Enide, he asks his future father-in-law if he might borrow some armour 'old or new, I care not, ugly or beautiful'. The man responds that Erec need have no fear on that count as he had 'good and beautiful armour' that he would gladly lend him. As the hero rides through the streets with the beautiful Enide at his side everyone declares that he must be a very fine warrior because the fine armour suits him so well.

In such tales there is invariably a scene in which the knight is depicted being armed for battle; each piece of armour is lovingly described as it is strapped on, culminating with the girding on of a sword, the donning of the helmet and the mounting of his horse. There is a sense of ritual about such scenes, as if in putting the armour on the hero was becoming the essence of the knightly order of which he was a part. Later in his tale, when Erec realized that his household believed he had lost his knightly prowess because he preferred the company of Enide over the pleasures of tournament or battle, his first act before riding out to a series of ever-larger encounters with robber-knights was to put on his armour. Similarly in the 15th-century tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* there is a detailed passage full of symbolism describing Gawain's arming before he travelled off to find the Green Knight's castle.

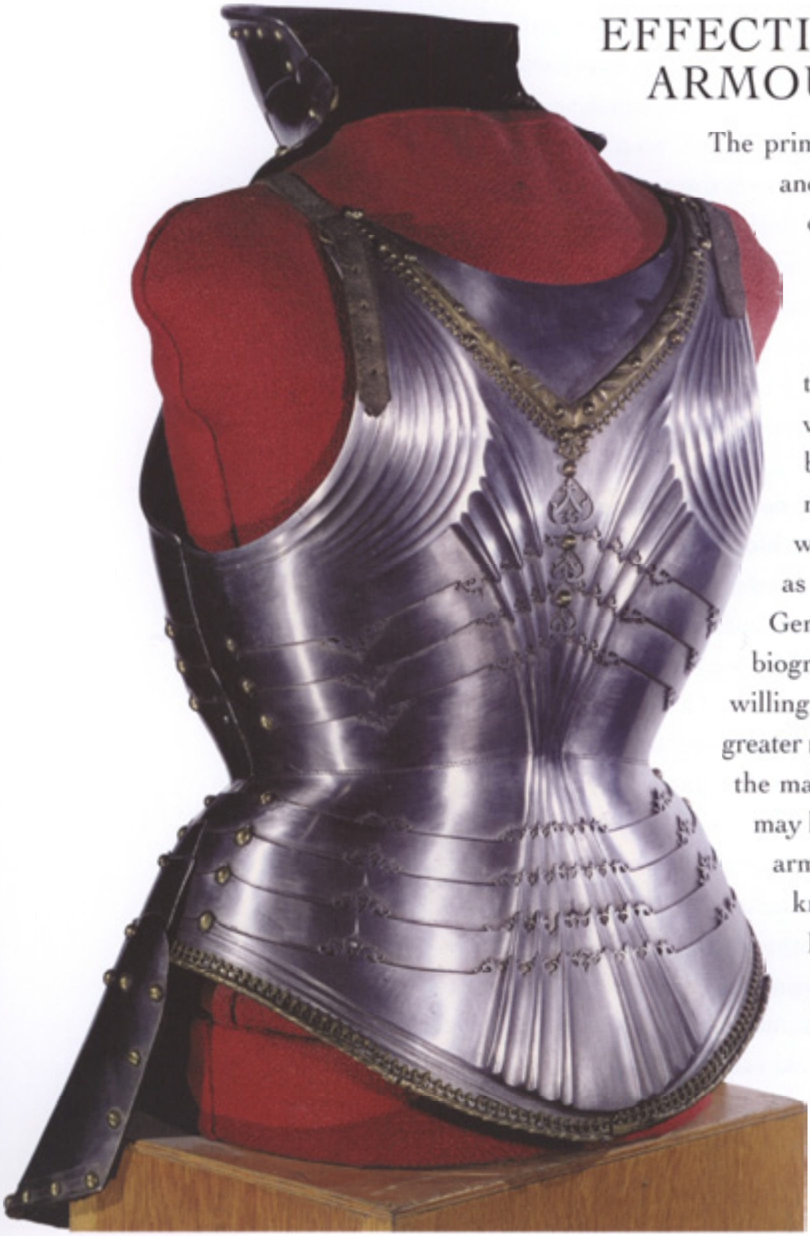
But on a more practical level the armour, weapons and mounts the knight required cost a substantial amount. Prices and values differed considerably but one can think of the full equipment of the knight, including his weapons, armour, horse and harness, as being around a year's income; around £20 for an English knight in 1250 (roughly equivalent to £200,000 or $300,000 in modern terms). Whilst this might not have been beyond the means of the knightly classes, particularly when we take into account the passing down of arms from father to son, the acquisition of equipment as gifts from lords or as booty in battle or in tournament or the market for hiring armour or buying it second-hand, it is clear that serving as a knight or man-at-arms was beyond the reach of the majority of the lower orders and those of middling rank. Some did rise beyond their humble origins, particularly in the 14th century when, as we shall see later, the distinction between the social class of knights and that of the gentry became blurred, but they were sometimes looked down upon by those born to knightly rank. Similarly, it is possible to see disdain for those who were of knightly status but who appeared improperly armed. Jean le Bel tells us that the English knights of the 1320s were held in scant regard by their French cousins because they still wore outdated mail armour and great helms.

The same links between knightly status and arms and armour were made in bureaucratic circles. Documents such as Henry II's 'Assize of Le Mans' and 'Assize of Arms', drawn up in 1180 and 1181 respectively, and similar legislation drawn up elsewhere in Europe, laid out the equipment expected of warriors turning out at the king's behest. The amount and quality of armour was based upon their annual income, in order to ensure that there were sufficient equipped men to serve the monarch's needs. For example, in the 1181 Assize a freedman with property and rents valued at £16 (£166,000 / $265,000) was expected to have the archetypal knightly equipment of helmet, hauberk, lance and shield, whilst one with rents and chattels valued at £10 (£100,000 / $160,000) was only expected to turn out with a cheaper *habergeoun* (a shirt of mail shorter in length and sleeves than a hauberk), an iron cap and lance. After recruitment switched from demanding service as a duty to indenting for it at a price (a process which was complete in England by the mid-14th century), the documents still insist that the hired soldier appear properly mounted and equipped, *'covenablement mountez et apparaillez'*, and captains would insist that their retinue arrive at muster properly equipped to avoid reproach. There are occasions where men were re-classified by royal officials at muster because their equipment did not meet the standard expected of a man-at-arms, with a reduction in wages and presumably a loss of face too.

A further indication of the link between status and equipment comes from the disciplinary codes, or *Ordinances*, that were drawn up before the onset of a campaign. Concerned with the maintenance of order and good discipline during the course of the campaign, they cover such matters as the order of march, the selection and layout of encampments and billeting of troops, theft within the army and looting, ransoms and the spoils of war. For the man-at-arms one of the most common punishments was the forfeiture of his horse and harness to the Crown. Such a punishment not only imposed a financial hardship, the equipment and mount representing a considerable investment, but it also took away the outward symbols of the man-at-arms' status, reducing him to the ranks of the footsoldier.

Of course some of the developments in arms and armour were purely cosmetic. Certain shapes or forms, more or less practical, became popular and their use spread across Europe. The German *Kastenbrust* of the first half of the 15th century, with its box-like breastplate and the forward-sloping nasal helm mentioned above, appear to have been wholly driven by fashion, whilst the fluting of the gothic harness was a combination of practical metallurgy, the effect serving to make the plates stronger without increasing weight, as well as making the armour pleasing to the eye and following architectural styles popular at the time.

The decoration of armour with gilding and painting was another means by which armour transcended the purely practical, although the habit of painting or even covering armour with fabric was sometimes used to disguise poor-quality workmanship. In 1347 the guild of helmet-makers (or *heaumers*) was established in London as a result of accusations that craftsmen were using the fashion for fabric-covered helmets to pass off poorly made examples by hiding imperfections beneath the coverings.



The fluting on this gothic armour not only strengthens the plate without increasing its thickness, but also serves a decorative function. (The Art Archive)

EFFECTIVENESS OF ARMOUR

The primary requirement in the selection of arms and armour was that they were practical and effective. The practicality of armour is not in question. Despite the Victorian idea, reinforced by the powerful imagery of Laurence Olivier's movie *Henry V* in which the French knights are depicted being winched onto their horses, armour was not bulky to the point where the wearers could not move. Full armour was not without weight and some limitation in mobility and, as we have seen in the comments of both Gerald of Wales and William Marshal's biographer, the knight was aware of this and willing to sacrifice some protection in favour of greater mobility. However, contrary to appearances, the mail armour and pot helm worn by Marshal may have been more cumbersome than the plate armour worn by the 15th-century French knight Jean le Maingre, known as Boucicault. His party piece was to turn cartwheels, vault into the saddle and climb the underside of ladders, all in full harness. Based on surviving armour, a complete plate harness would weigh in the region of 45 to 65 pounds. Unlike the mail shirt, which hung from the shoulders (although some of the weight could be taken on the hips by cinching the shirt with a belt), plate armour was attached by linen cords to an arming doublet, holding the leg and arm assemblies in place and also helping to distribute its weight around the body.

The ability to wear and move in armour is only one half of the equation. It was also necessary that the armour protect its wearer from injury. Judging the effectiveness of armour is a trickier proposition. Our sources are contradictory. The heroes and villains of the epic and romance tales deal each other Herculean blows that smash shields and rend hauberks. In the 12th-century romance *Cligés* the hero's father, Alexander, 'killed many and left many wounded, for like a flashing thunderbolt he swept through all he encountered. No byrnie [a form of mail shirt] or shield could save any man he struck with his lance or sword.' The epic hero Oliver, in the *Song of Roland,* killed one Saracen warrior with a single blow that sliced through his helmet, head, body, hauberk, saddle *and* horse.

The visual imagery can be equally gory. The Bayeux Tapestry, the 13th-century Pierpont-Morgan picture bible, the 14th-century Courtrai chest, all are just the most obvious examples, depicting horrific injuries reminiscent of the epics: deep gashes, men being sliced in half, severed limbs and heads, all of which suggests that the knights' weapons were highly effective but that their armour was, in the words of the epics 'not worth a straw'.

Of course the Hollywood violence of the epics and romances is exaggerated and their audiences knew it. The power of the blows and the wounds both inflicted and received reflected the prowess of the warrior; heroes must perform heroically after all. Some of our 'factual' narratives, such as the biographical *History of William Marshal,* are couched in the same vein, intending to entertain as much as inform. It is possible that our illustrators were also influenced by these tales, or were drawing on exemplars of an earlier, more sanguine age. The subject matter might also dictate the imagery. Old Testament descriptions of battle often describe deaths in the thousands and tens of thousands. The 14th-century *Philippide* notes that 'nowadays modern men take much greater care to protect themselves than did the ancients who would often, as we learn from our reading, fall by the thousand thousand [*sic*] in a single day'. The bloodiness of the illustrations in the Pierpont-Morgan bible and others might be seen merely as reflecting their source material.

The *History of William Marshal* is not the only 'factual' narrative that bears out the testimony of the fictional sources. Both Gerald of Wales and the contemporary poem detailing the actions of the Normans in Ireland, better known as *The Song of Dermot and the Earl,* record how John the Wode, leading a force to regain Dublin, severed the leg of a knight with his axe, cutting through the skirts of his hauberk. Gerald also tells how a shot from a Welshman's bow pinned a man to his horse, going through the hauberk skirt, the underlying mail chausses and the wooden saddle tree to do so. More often, however, we hear of men being killed when blows hit unprotected parts. Thus the great English commander Sir John Chandos was killed in a minor skirmish at Lussac in 1369, during the Hundred Years War, when he slipped and received a lance thrust through his open visor. John, Lord Clifford, is said to have been killed at Ferrybridge on the eve of the great Wars of the Roses battle of Towton in March of 1461, receiving an arrow in the throat after removing his bevor. In both cases the failure is not in the armour but in the men's failure to use it properly, and the narrators make that point quite clearly.

It is far more easy to find in the chronicles and annals comments that remark on the quality and effectiveness of armour. Guillaume le Breton wrote how at the battle of Bouvines in 1214 French knights could not be harmed even when unhorsed 'unless first their bodies are dispossessed of the armour protecting them, so much has each knight covered his members with several layers of iron'. It was noted during the First Crusade that the crusader knights would ride out of battle looking like porcupines, covered in the arrows of the Muslims, but otherwise unharmed. In a similar fashion, Lodewijk van Velthem, one of the chroniclers of the battle of Courtrai between the French and Flemish in 1302, wrote that:

> ... the arrows flew through the air so thickly that no one could see the sky. Still the Flemish army did not give way, even though the neck pieces, tunics, bucklers, targes, helmets and shields which they used to protect themselves were full of arrows. From their heads to their feet there were arrows, in their equipment and in their clothing...

And these were militiamen, not equipped in the full armour of their knightly opponents.

Once we get past the hyperbole of the epic and romance genres it is clear that most of our written sources agree with the sentiments of Guillaume le Breton, that armour was important for the protection of the warrior. Orderic Vitalis tells us that at the battle of Brémule, fought between Henry II of England and Louis VI of France in 1119, only three knights were killed out of the 900 who took part because 'they were all clad in mail and spared each other out of fear of God and fellowship in arms'. There are many examples where the failure to put on armour, in particular the helmet, was considered very foolhardy, suggesting it was considered a highly effective and necessary form of defence. The protection that was offered by a good helmet can be seen in the *History of William Marshal*. After the tournament at Pleurs in 1178 it was agreed that William should be given the prize as the knight showing the greatest prowess in the *mêlée*, but he was nowhere to be found. After a search he was finally seen with his head on a blacksmith's anvil as the craftsmen tried to pry his helmet's plates apart so that he could get it off his head, so badly had it been battered.

Many sources suggest that the wearing of armour allowed knights to behave more courageously on the battlefield. The Rule of the Templars distinguishes between sergeants who wear armour and those without, instructing that:

> ... the sergeant brothers who are armed in mail should conduct themselves under arms as is given for the knight brothers; and the other sergeant brothers who are not armed, if they act well, will receive thanks from God and the brothers. And if they see that they cannot resist or that they are wounded, they may go to the back, if they wish, without permission, and without harm coming to the house.

There were also different expectations for the behaviour of knightly combatants faced with unarmoured knightly opponents. The biography of William Marshal tells us that when Marshal confronted Count Richard – the prince who would eventually become 'the Lionheart' – outside Le Mans the latter reminded him that to kill him 'would be a wicked thing to do, since you find me here completely unarmed' to which Marshal replied that he would let the Devil have Richard and aimed a lance thrust at the Count's horse, killing it.

Studies of the armour itself or of the remains of those killed in battle would seem to be a much more definitive source of information than the exaggerated claims and fantasy of written and visual sources, yet even here the evidence is patchy and unsatisfactory.

It is often of little value to look for indications of use on arms and armour. Marks on the edge of a blade are often lost to corrosion and whilst some armours do bear scratches and dents that show their use in combat inevitably the pieces that completely failed their owners will have been discarded or cut up and re-used. For similar reasons the majority of surviving armour dates from the 14th century or later; *cuir bouilli* and mail armour degenerates more quickly and is more readily re-tailored.

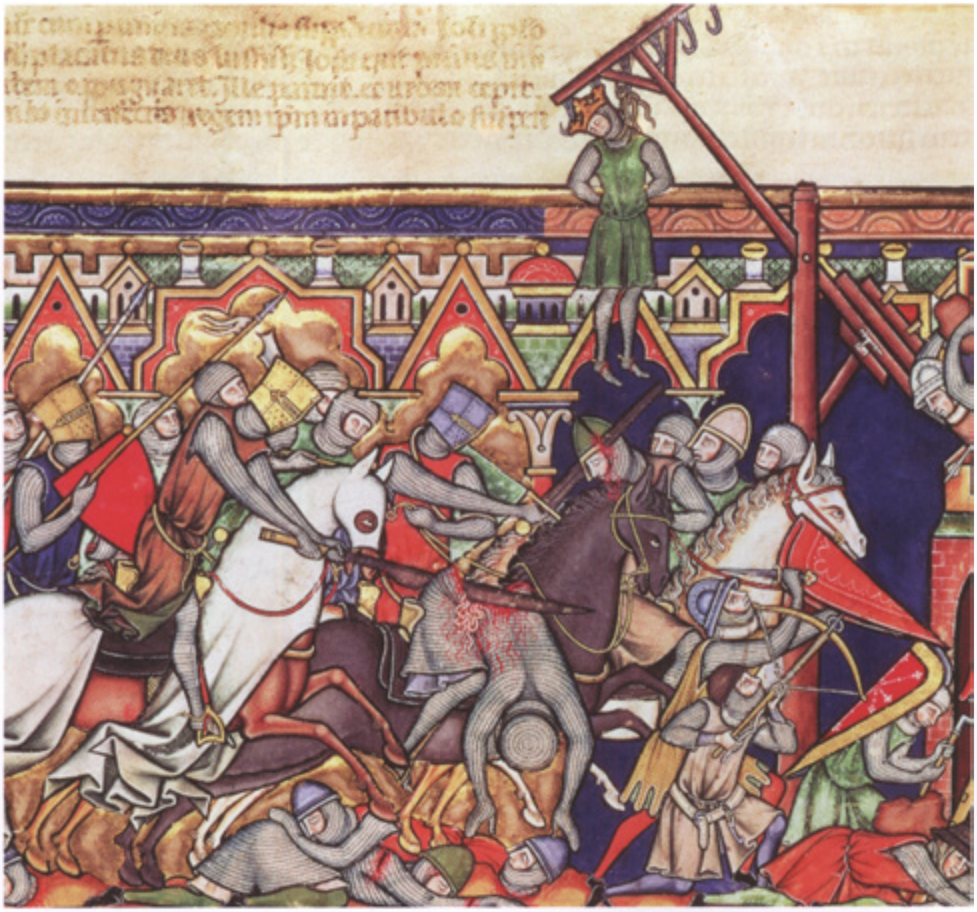
Since no curator or collector is going to allow their precious arrowheads or sword blades to be used to strike their equally precious breastplates or bascinets, testing generally takes the form of metallographic studies of small slivers of metal taken from unobtrusive areas. This gives some indication of the quality of the iron and steel used and, therefore, of the manufacturing processes of the armourers and the hardness of the armour. This can enable penetration tests of metal of a similar microscopic structure. However, in lab conditions the test tends to consist of a shaped weight striking a flat metal plate at an angle of 90 degrees which, while sufficient to give an approximation of the force required, does not accurately reflect the shape of armour plate, nor the way in which weapons tend to impact upon it. Nor do the tests usually take into account underlying layers of padding or that a standing human does not present as solid a target as a lab bench. Conversely, studies which try to recreate weapon impacts on real armour are obviously reliant on replica weapons and armour, the quality and composition of which vary and may not match that of the medieval originals. Such studies have also focused on one of the key debates in medieval military history, the deadliness of the longbow. As a result tests tend to comprise arrow shots, with relatively little work being done with close-combat weapons.

Battlefield graves are even more rare than examples of surviving armour and in only one, that of Wisby, were the corpses buried in the armour they had worn on the field, allowing us some idea of how much (or how little) protection it afforded. The skeletal remains, as we shall see later on, give little indication of soft tissue wounds – thrusts that penetrated the vital organs but left no marks on bone – which might lead one to conclude that the body armour was more effective than it actually was. Furthermore, all of these graves contain common soldiers. Those of knightly rank were almost always recovered from the field and taken elsewhere for individual burial. The experience of battle, level of protection and the type of combat they would be engaged in might be totally different, so again any conclusions one makes drawn on this evidence must be somewhat tentative.

What all of the source material, archaeological record and practical studies seem to suggest is that the image of the epic hero cleaving his opponents in two is a grossly exaggerated one and that, if wearing the most up-to-date form of armour, the knight was generally well protected against the common weapons of the time. There was, however, a continuing race, with bows and crossbows becoming more powerful and numerous hand weapons being designed specifically to penetrate armour. In turn armour developed in response and the whole cycle repeated.

THE HORSE

The horse is synonymous with the knight. In all European languages except English, the knight was named for and distinguished by his mount. It is almost inconceivable to picture the knight without his equally imposing warhorse. Once again, however, we must be careful not to be too ready to accept the popular images of the lumbering carthorse-like brute, or the 18- or 19-hand (6 feet to 6 feet 4 inches) giant. These are based on misapprehensions about the weight of man and armour and the nature of medieval cavalry tactics as blunt and unsophisticated, requiring a weighty rather than manoeuvrable mount. Even if such images are based on contemporary illustrations such as the Luttrell psalter or Ucello's mural of the 14th-century mercenary captain Sir John Hawkwood, which do appear to show massive mounts, we must be cautious. As with many medieval artworks, and in common with 18th-century paintings of



Battle image from the 13th-century Pierpont-Morgan picture bible. There is perhaps a touch of Hollywood in the goriness of these images. The weapon the central figure wields is known only from manuscript illustrations. (Bridgeman Art Library)

racehorses or prize-winning livestock, the artist can be seen to emphasize and exaggerate those aspects thought virtuous: in the case of the warhorse his height and powerful frame. Even the fittest and least encumbered of knights would have had difficulty in vaulting onto the back of a horse 19 hands (6 feet 4 inches) high.

The majority of illustrations indicate that the medieval warhorse – the 'great horse', '*dextrarius*' or '*destrier*' – stood around 15 to 16 hands (5 feet to 5 feet 4 inches) high, which is supported by the evidence of surviving horseshoes, saddlery and other furniture. Height only offers one aspect of the horse's size, however. It is also appears that he (the European warhorse was invariably a stallion) was short-backed and broad chested, a solid mount with a good combination of strength, stamina and speed.

Like the modern thoroughbred racehorse, or a high performance racing car, he was kept for a specific purpose. He was the vehicle for the charge, the platform from which the knight fought. He would no more be used for travelling or the hunt than a modern racehorse would be used for trekking or the racing car for nipping to the shops.

The knight would have different horses for different purposes. The biographer of the 15th-century Spanish knight Don Pero Nino noted that his lord had horses trained for war, horses trained for the tournament and horses trained for parades. As with the description of armour, it is not always clear what sort of horse is being described, and very often the commentator is more interested in the colour and behaviour of the mount than in its conformation. Some types we can recognize, however. The knight would have had riding animals, known as rounceys, hackneys, amblers or trotters, with an easy and comfortable gait. He would have had similar horses for his squires and servants, as well as pack horses (or sumpters) and mules. A relatively late addition to the military stable was the courser, a horse bred for hunting. In the 14th century this became a popular alternative to the 'great horse' as the main mount for combat.

The actual number of horses a knight might take on campaign varied substantially over time and, of course, depending on the wealth of the individual knight, but a sense of the number of mounts considered proper and necessary can be gained by looking at the instructions laid down in the Rule of the Templars. Being based upon a monastic community, albeit one that fought the enemies of God with swords rather than prayers, the brothers were allowed minimal personal belongings, everything else being provided for them by the Order itself. The Rule held that the knight-brothers were to be permitted three mounts each, with a fourth for his squire, if the officers of his house felt it necessary. The senior officers were allowed four horses and a riding mount. At the other end of the scale the sergeant-brothers were allowed one horse each, although those with special duties, such as the *gonfannier* (who would carry the Order's black and white banner into battle) or the farrier, could have two. Knights who joined the Order of the Knights Hospitaller were to arrive with their own equipment, including three mounts.

Andrew Ayton's work on the horse inventories that were created by English royal clerks at the outset of royal campaigns in the mid-1300s as part of the system of *restauro equorum* by which the Crown underwrote the value of some of the horses taken on campaign, suggests a similar range of numbers.* In 1340, for example, the Crown undertook to transport four horses for each knight returning from the Flemish port of Sluys. Ayton notes that the value (and presumably quality) of mounts fluctuates, and that the type of horse taken on campaign also changes. Whilst the courser was the popular mount for campaigns against the Scots, Welsh and Irish, a larger number of 'great horses' are recorded for the campaigns against the French. He suggests this might be because the knights felt that there would be greater opportunity to use these highly specialized and valued mounts against the French than against their British neighbours, who were much less likely to offer pitched battle on open ground, but would lead them on long chases across rough country, just the sort of thing that a hunting horse excelled at. Alternatively, Ayton suggests, the English knights might have felt the need to push the boat out in terms of status and display against a foe considered the pinnacle of European chivalry by bringing their finest and most expensive mounts.

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* Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses*, pp.57–59.

HORSE ARMOUR

Such investments needed to be protected, and it is unsurprising that there should be a development in horse armour that parallels that of armour for the knight. It was by no means a total innovation; the late Roman army had used horses wholly covered in mail or lamellar armour for the *cataphracti* (literally 'completely enclosed') or *klibanophoroi* (meaning 'camp oven'; a humorous reference to how quickly these fully armoured men and horses would heat up!), both of which were adopted from their Sassanid Persian neighbours who spanned the Middle East between the second and seventh centuries. Whilst such armour continued to be used in small numbers in the Byzantine East, this practice had died out in Western Europe long before.

The Rule of the Templars makes no reference to either bards or horse armour (although it does specify that no brother should have an ornate and decorated bridle), which might suggest that at the time of its writing (between 1135 and 1187) horse armour was not used. When interpreting the visual sources, the same problem exists for identifying horse armour as it does for spotting early 13th-century plate armour. Just as a pair of plates might be hidden beneath a flowing surcoat, so horse armour might lie beneath an emblazoned 'bard', 'caparison' or 'hoarding' – cloth covers that need not be armour themselves. Such bardings appear in illustrations from around the first decade of the 13th century, but this need not mean that the horse was armoured at this point. By the end of the 13th century the term *milites cum equus coopertus*, 'warriors with covered horses', was being used to differentiate between the knight and man-at-arms and the less well equipped and socially inferior sergeants, squires, hobelars and the like, who were referred to as *milites cum equus discoopertus*.

A clear indication of armour is to be found in a manuscript of Thomas of Kent's *Roman de Toute Chevalerie*, dated to around 1250 and illustrated by Matthew Paris or one of that school of illuminators. It includes some depictions of horses in full mail barding, including a scene of armourers working on the front half of a set and although not every horse is so equipped, this is supported by several manuscripts of similar date.

Cuir bouilli defences were also used; Edward I provided 38 *chamfrons*, or headpieces, and a similar number of *cruppers*, which covered the horse's rump, for a tournament at

Opposite: This armoured barding for a horse, of the late 15th century, is designed to match and complement that of his rider. (© Board of Trustees of the Armouries, II.3)

Windsor Park in 1278. In the 1322 inventory of Wigmore Castle five pairs of chamfrons are recorded, along with five pairs of leather *flanchers* and *peytrals*, which would cover the horse's withers and chest respectively. The Luttrell psalter image of about 20 years later clearly shows Sir Geoffrey Luttrell's mount with a chamfron. This is almost certainly of leather as it sports a fan-like crest identical to that on the banneret's helm, which would itself have been almost certainly constructed of *cuir bouilli*.

The joust had a great impact on the development of armour. The danger of the creatures running into each other or, after its introduction in the 1420s, into the tilt barrier led to the development in the 14th century of padded buffers that sat beneath the caparison and protected the horse's chest. But again it was the metallurgical developments of the 14th century that brought about the clearest changes. The ability to create large iron blooms meant that plate armour could be made for the horse as well as his rider. Starting with the chamfron, by the mid-15th century the 'soft' armours had been replaced by hinged and pinned plates. At about the same time cloth bardings become relegated to the tournament and pageant field, in part because they were an unnecessary encumbrance but also, perhaps, because of the contemporary fashion amongst men-at-arms for doing away with heraldic surcoats to show off the 'white harness' underneath.

The knight in shining armour of popular image, encased in a carapace of steel, was a late arrival onto the medieval scene. His wargear evolved almost continuously as armourers and weapon-smiths responded to the changing tactical needs and fashions of their clients and to the changing quality of their metals. Developments in the power and effectiveness of weapons were countered by changes in armour which in turn led to further improvements in arms. Thus the knight of the 12th century, clad in mail and a nasal helm, was as well protected from the weapons of his day as the plate-armoured man-at-arms of the 15th century, but this by no means made him invulnerable.

The knight had a range of options to choose from, in terms of both the armour he wore and the weapons he used and whilst the culture of personal prowess and the expectations of fashions might direct those choices to a certain extent, a sophisticated understanding of tactics and battlefield also played a role. The nature of that tactical sophistication and how and where the warrior acquired it is the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER
TWO

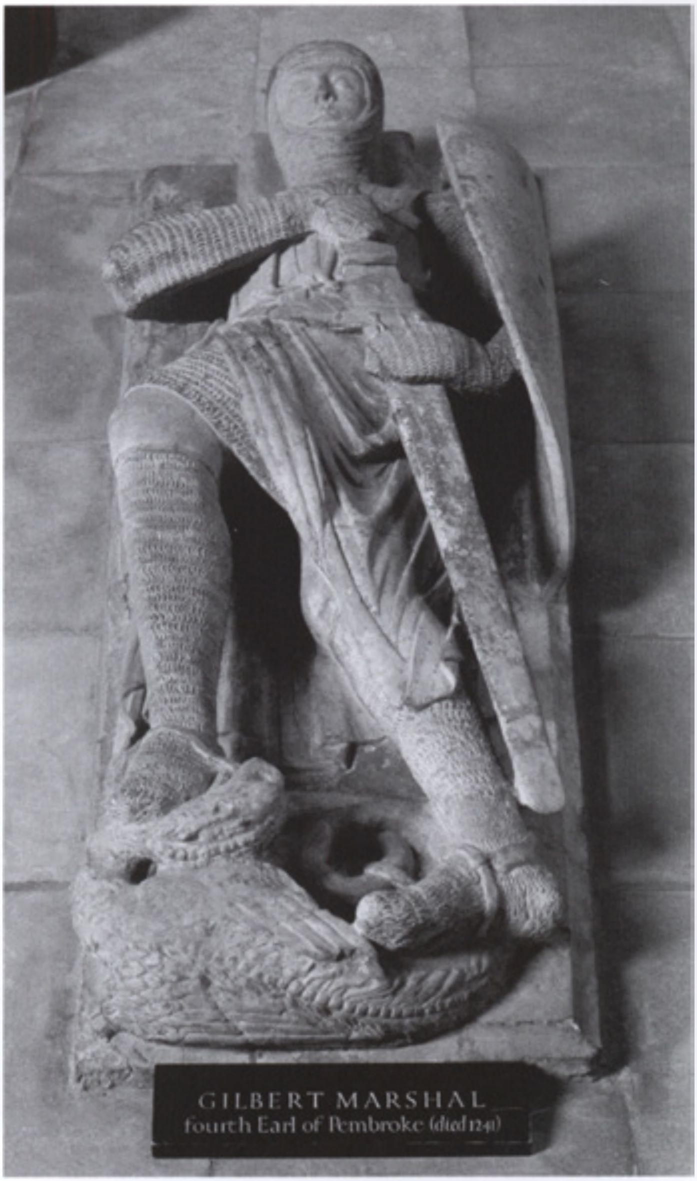
TACTICS AND TRAINING

CONTRARY TO THE POPULAR IMAGE KNIGHTS DID NOT CRUDELY hack away at each other until one was beaten into submission. Success in combat required skill, intelligence and talent as well as brute strength. The weapons they used had evolved into precision tools and handling them successfully required training and practice to perfect. Riding too was a skill that had to be mastered, the more so as the knight would be in armour and fighting for his life at the same time.

INDIVIDUAL SKILLS

Horsemanship was probably the first skill that a medieval knight learnt. There is little doubt that a child was learning to ride long before he could hold a sword or bear the weight of a hauberk. It was one of the fundamental accomplishments of all the noble elite. Jordanus Rufus, a southern Italian who wrote a treatise on the care of horses in the 13th century, says that 'it is by horses that princes, magnates and knights are separated from lesser people and ... a lord cannot fittingly be seen amongst private citizens except through the mediation of a horse'. Simply put, quality rode where lesser folk walked.

For the knight more was required than being able to ride through a crowd of peasants. He had to be able to mount, dismount and ride whilst armoured and carrying his shield and lance. He needed to be adept at manoeuvring his horse through tight turns and wheels at high speed, maintaining that control in the midst of battle. Whilst his mount might be somewhat inured to the noise and chaos of battle (16th-century manuals, surely based on earlier practice, advocated that the warhorse in training was to be ridden past servants waving banners, shouting and beating drums to prepare it for battle) there was still a danger of it panicking. As we have noted, it was the stallion that was chosen for the role of the 'great horse' or *destrier* because its strength and fiery temperament could be used on the field. Control of such powerful beasts was considered a martial virtue. It is a motif of heroic literature that the hero should have a horse that only he could tame, the quintessential example being Alexander the Great's horse Bucephalus (literally 'bull headed'). Almost certainly using that legend as a basis, the biographer of William Marshal tells us how at the onset of one of his first major tournaments William, impoverished and lacking a mount, was forgotten when horses from the stable of his lord William de Tancarville were given to members of the household. When Marshal complained he was given the last remaining horse, 'a strong, fine and well-proportioned horse, very lively, swift and powerful... A horse fine and valuable had it not been for one terrible flaw that was a terrible drawback: the horse was so wild that it could not be tamed.' Just like Alexander, William was able to tame the creature by using his knowledge of horses and horsemanship. Alexander used gentle words and turned the horse away from its own shadow, which had frightened it; William lengthened the bridle and adjusted the bit so as to press less hard on the horse's mouth. Ironically William's third son, Gilbert, was killed at a tournament in 1241 when, as he struggled to control a new and spirited Italian charger, the bit broke and he was thrown from the saddle and, his foot tangled in his stirrup, dragged along the ground for a great distance.



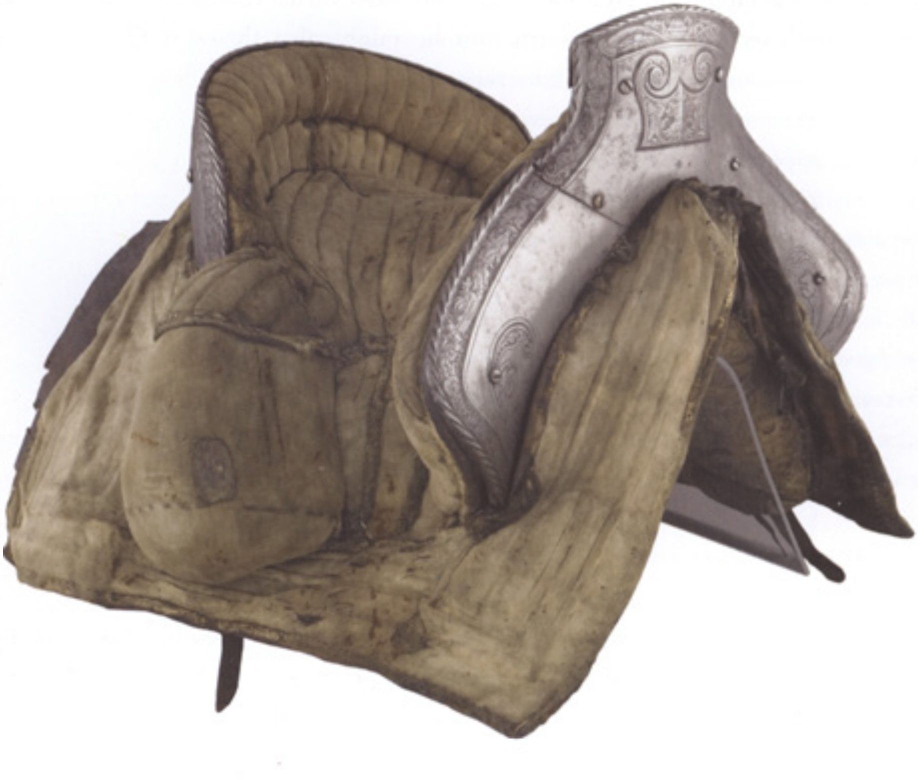
The effigy of Gilbert Marshal in the Temple church, London, gives no indication of the unfortunate manner of his death, dragged behind his runaway horse at a tournament. (Bridgeman Art Library)

On top of everything else, the knight had to be able to keep his seat whilst wielding lance and sword, striking and being struck by opponents. The unhorsing of an enemy was a key tactic of the period. Even if the blow did not kill him it left him vulnerable (though not defenceless) to further strikes or for capture and ransom. The combat could be brutal. The *History of William Marshal* is replete with examples of knights grappling with each other, grabbing for their opponents' helmets, bits, bridles and stirrups in an attempt to wrestle them from their mounts. In one engagement William's opponents managed to turn his helmet right around and he could only free it by tearing at the laces, injuring his hand in the process. Joinville records how, during the French king Louis IX's crusade into Egypt in 1250 he was struck by a lance that 'caught me between the shoulders, pinning me down to the neck of my horse in such a way that I could not draw the sword at my belt'.

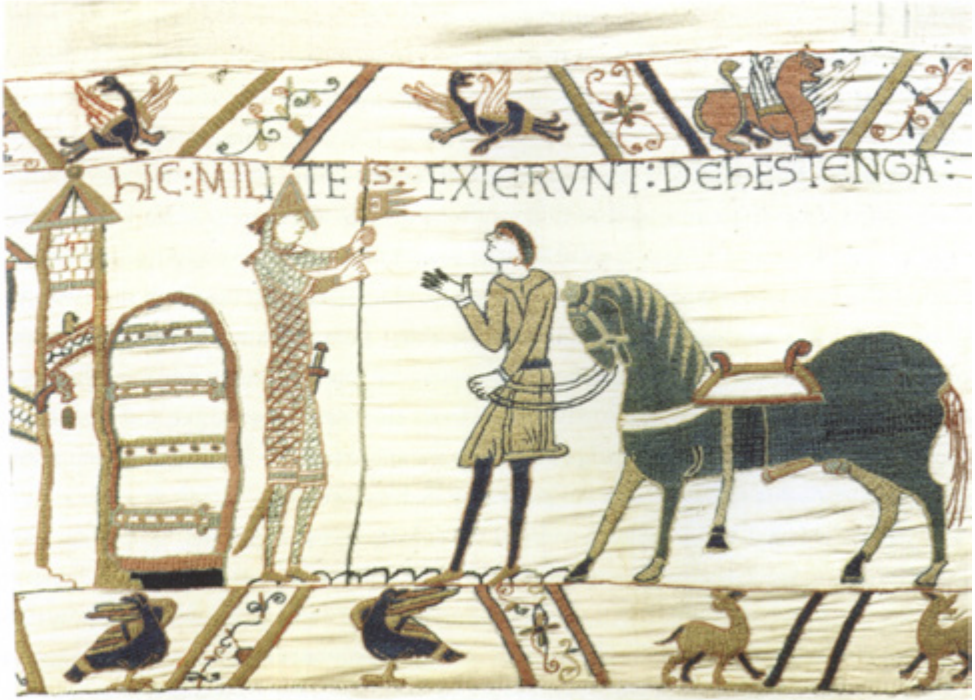
One of the reasons Joinville became pinned was that his saddle held him in place. The medieval war saddle developed alongside the tactic of fighting with couched lance, which channelled enormous forces, the mass and impetus of both knights and their mounts, through the tip of the lance. The saddles and seat of the Carolingian horseman would have seen both attacker and target flung from their saddles.

But those depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry and other contemporary images, with their high pommel and cantle and long stirrup leathers attached to the front edge, meant that the knight rode very deep in the saddle as a result, almost standing up with his legs at full stretch and pushed forward, whilst his pelvis was enclosed within the high and curving saddlebows. Although this made him almost impossible to knock from the saddle it also meant that the knight could not so easily use his legs as aids in directing his mount, which also explains the seemingly ridiculous long spurs that are to be found; their long shafts were necessary to reach the horse's flanks. The war saddle was also very high off the horse's back, the large tree and padding serving to spread the weight of saddle and rider more evenly, but this would have meant that the rider had very little sensation of the movement of the horse beneath him. As a result the knight would have had to be a very skilled rider, sensitive to the slightest changes in the movement and gait of the horse.

Riding was only part of the skill set that the knight required for war. He also had to be able to handle weapons at the same time. The use of the spear or lance before the development of couching would appear to require much greater skill and dexterity



The high pommel and cantle of the knight's saddle, like this 16th-century example, helped to hold the rider in place against the shock of a lance strike. (Bridgeman Art Library)



The saddle of this warhorse from the Bayeux Tapestry has a high pommel and cantle, suggesting it to be an early innovation. The Tapestry also makes it very clear that the Normans preferred their mounts to be stallions! (The Art Archive)

than after its development. Not only would the rider thrust the lance at his enemies, doing so both over- and under-arm, but he might also throw it like a javelin. By comparison the knight of the 14th century had only to tuck the lance tight into his armpit and ride straight at his foe. Of course it was not as simple as that. The later lance was heavier and, being longer, more awkward to hold in this position for too long. Even a well-balanced lance of seasoned wood would put a huge strain on the wrist if held level for any length of time. Instead it was carried upright, resting on a pad or *fewter* on the saddlebow until the last minute. The point had to be aimed and held steady in order to ensure a good sound hit. A Syrian emir of the late 12th century, Usamah ibn Munqidh, says that in order to use the couched lance effectively 'it is indispensable ... to press his hand and forearm against his side when holding it, and let his horse guide itself as best it can at the moment at which he strikes. For if a man move his hand to guide his horse, the blow leaves no trace and does no damage.' That aiming point could be varied somewhat, striking anywhere from the head to the chest or lower still to strike at the opponent's leg or mount, although the latter two targets were considered unworthy blows and would, in a tournament situation, be penalized. In Hans Talhoffer's 15th-century *Fechtbuch* there are only a few plates dedicated to mounted combat, but one shows a rider with his lance being held high above his right shoulder and angled down across the body to rest over his left arm which holds the reins. It is clear that it is intended that the lance be used to fend off blows in much the same way as a sword blade or spear might be used on foot, and this should caution us against assuming that couching the lance was the only tactic that might be used after 1066.

The powerful impact of a lance strike could easily rip the lance from a rider's hand, throw him, as well as his opponent, from the saddle or even bring both him and his mount to a dead stop. A successful charge with couched lance required the ability to time the lowering of the lance, the aiming of the point and the angle of the strike to perfection, all coordinated with getting an extra burst of speed from the mount to carry the rider past his foe, all the while trying to counter the animal's (and indeed rider's own) natural tendency to shy away from the oncoming target and seemingly inevitable collision. Trying to judge all of this from behind a helmet which limited his view and upset his balance took considerable skill and daring.

Whilst the lance-armed charge was not the sole tactic used by the knight, after 1066 his equipment and mount were increasingly geared towards this specialist form of combat, and it dominates the descriptions of combat in the period, especially the idealized fictions of romance and epic. There was clearly something about this form of combat that appealed to the knightly class psychologically. Perhaps it was a sense of the raw power of the collision, the drama of the thunderous charge, or the purity of the strike. It was a one-on-one encounter that tested courage, skill and physical strength in equal measure. It was not, however, the only option available to the knight on the field. If the lance was dropped or when it inevitably shattered, the knight would then turn to his other weapons.

According to his biographer, one of William Marshal's favourite tactics on the tournament field was to subdue an enemy by wrestling with him, getting him into a headlock and tearing off his helmet. This dramatic approach is illustrated in a tournament scene from the 13th-century German *Manesse Codex*, and the ways in which this might be done were also recorded by Talhoffer, who shows plates of horsemen catching their opponents' lances under their arms, grabbing the opponents' reins at the gallop to overthrow both horse and rider, and employing various wrestling techniques including arm- and headlocks.

Whilst such grappling might be a reasonably safe proposition at a tournament where there was rarely any desire to do permanent injury to an opponent, on the battlefield it was more normal to reach for one's sword, axe or mace. It has been argued that the charge with the lance was of little danger to an opponent, being far more likely to knock him out of the saddle, and that its use was symptomatic of the chivalric desire to capture rather than kill an opponent. Whilst there is little hard evidence to support such a proposition, which indeed seems counterintuitive given the physics behind it, it does seem that to attack with hand weapons was a more aggressive act. When Matilda's supporters sallied out of Lincoln and launched their attack against Stephen's forces, the latter were thrown into confusion because their attackers did not joust with them but instead came to close quarters with swords.

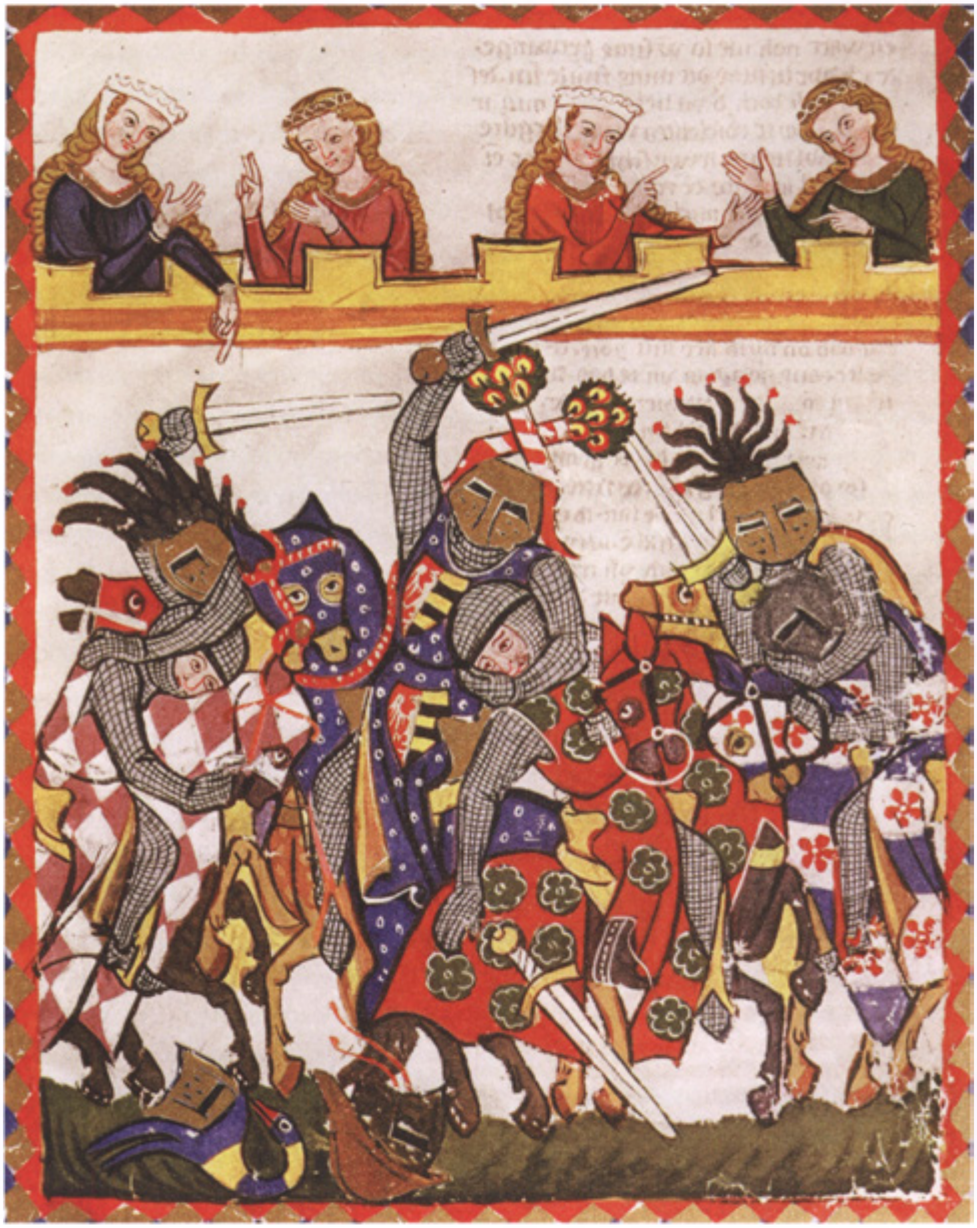
Not that the sword was unsophisticated. It was a very refined weapon, and going into a sword fight blindly hacking at an opponent would get a warrior quickly killed. Instead fighting with a medieval sword, whether on foot or horseback, was like a modern fencing bout; it was about feints and parries, combinations of cuts and thrusts. The *Fechtbücher* demonstrate a bewildering range of moves and counter-moves, utilizing both the sword's point and edge with equal effectiveness. As noted above they also include 'plays' (sets of actions and counter-actions) that are specifically designed for combats between armoured opponents. Here the cut and thrust at distance, the mainstay of the unarmoured techniques, are foregone in favour of closing with the opponent and engaging him at 'half sword' with the left hand grasping the blade about halfway along its length. From this position the sword could be more deftly aimed at the gaps in armour, through the visor or under the rim of helmets such as the sallet, into the armpit or groin. The sword could also be readily reversed to strike with the pommel or wielded axe-like to strike an opponent with the points of the guard. Whilst such attacks were unlikely to penetrate an opponent's armour they might render him insensible or at least put him off balance, enabling a more lethal attack to get through. The cross could also be used to hook an opponent's neck or his arm or leg in order to throw him off balance.

Some of the *Fechtbücher* include instructions for fighting with spears, pollaxes and other hafted weapons. What is striking about these treatises is how similar the plays are to those for the sword. Many of those given for fighting with the longsword, the hand-and-a-half sword typically used on the battlefields of the mid-14th century onwards, are also to be seen in the illustration of pollaxe fighting, for example. On reflection this should not be surprising. Delivering a cut with a longsword and a strike with a pollaxe required the same movement of legs, body and arms, and the most obvious counter to it – a mirror-image move to block the blow followed by a thrust to the face – would be equally effective with either weapon.

Whilst the *Fechtbücher* show the sophistication of medieval combat techniques, every bit as complex and nuanced as the martial arts of east Asia, they were not, as we shall see later, primarily intended to train the warrior for the battlefield. Some of the more complex plays are far too involved and risky to have been performed in the middle of the *mêlée* with enemies on all sides. Similarly whilst individual prowess and skill at arms was of great importance to the knight culturally, on the field of battle that skill was insufficient.

SMALL-UNIT TACTICS

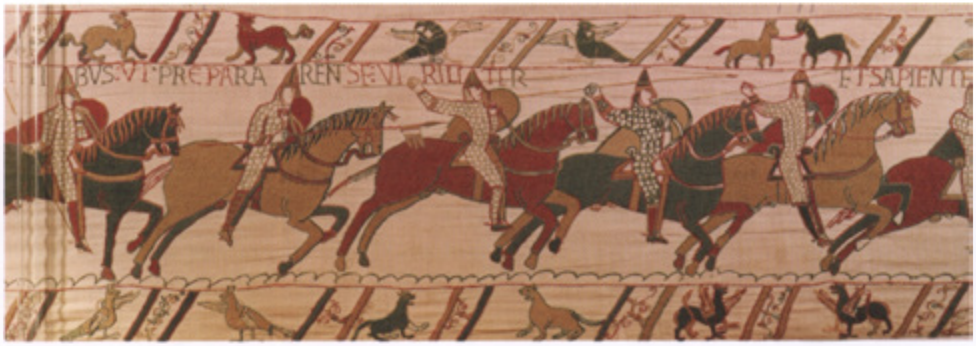
Joinville tells us of Gautier d'Autreche who, at the battle of Damietta during Louis IX's crusade, rode out alone from his pavilion into the midst of the Muslim enemy, and was unhorsed and mortally wounded. Hearing of his death King Louis remarked that 'he would not care to have a thousand men like Gautier, for they would



Combat in a 13th-century German tournament. It is clear that the defeated knights have had their helmets torn from their heads, as described in the *History of William Marshal*, rendering them defenceless. (The Art Archive) want to go against his orders as this knight had done'. The biographer of William Marshal records how during a tournament held between the towns of Gournay and Ressons 'those who had rode up over-arrogantly were routed. They never kept together in tight formation. They were quickly discomfited and were so disorganized that no man kept with another'. In battle it was vital that combatants cooperated. William Marshal's biographer summarizes the situation with the phrase '*fols est qui trop toste se desrote*'; 'a man who breaks ranks too early is a fool.'

The Rule of the Templars gives clear instructions on how its members were to conduct themselves on the field and whilst both they and the Hospitallers, whose regulations were very similar, might have a more formal discipline and structure by dint of their being in part a monastic order, they must surely have been based on practices common to knightly forces. Once in his *eschielle*, or squadron, no brother-knight was permitted to charge or leave without permission of the Marshal, who alone gave the command to charge. Nor was he to turn his horse's head to the rear to fight or to shout. The only exception to this was that a brother might leave the ranks to adjust his saddle or, if he saw a Christian who 'acts foolishly, and any Turk attacks him in order to kill him, and he is in peril of death' he might go to his aid, which reinforces the idea that those who rode out alone were behaving rashly. As soon as this task had been accomplished the Templar was to return quietly to his place in the ranks. Once engaged no brother was to leave the field without permission, even if wounded, on pain of being expelled from the Order.

Thus the knight fought not as an individual but as part of a small unit – the *eschielle* of the Rule of the Templars, or similar units called *conrois* or *constabularii* – of anywhere between ten and 50 men, who supported each other in battle. In the Rule the squadrons were formed around a commander and banner, the knights attacking 'in front and behind, to the left and the right, and wherever they think they can torment their enemies' so long as they were able to protect their banner. A similar structure almost certainly underpinned the *conrois* and *familiae* of 'ordinary' knights. In the tournaments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Norman knights charging at Hastings. Until the 15th century, artistic techniques made it very difficult to give a sense of the depth of the formations into which knights were organized. (Bridgeman Art Library) it seems clear that retinues would form around their lord, in part to protect him but also to clear the way through so that he might engage an opposing noble. When our narratives tell us, as they often do, of the great deeds of an individual lord he was almost certainly surrounded and supported by the members of his household.

The most important aspect of the charge was that it should be conducted *ordinate*, in good order. George Bernard Shaw, in his satirical play *Arms and the Man*, likened a charge to throwing peas against a window pane: 'first comes one, then two or three close behind him, then all the rest in a lump'. For a charge to be successful it was vital that all of the participants arrived together. Orderic Vitalis tells us that the French launched the first fierce charge against the Anglo-Normans at the battle of Brémule but 'charging in disorder, they were beaten off and, quickly tiring, turned tail'. This analysis is supported by Orderic's contemporary, the Frenchman Abbot Suger. He says of the same French attack that they 'were in disorder, and fell upon the extremely well ordered and smartly formed troops. As happens in such a case, they could not withstand the controlled pressure of the enemy, and beat a hasty retreat.' A total of 80 knights who were in the forefront of the charge, including a number of Normans who had joined the French king against their own duke, Robert Curthose, were quickly surrounded and cut off. With a fifth of his force lost to him Louis was persuaded to flee the field. In another example, it was disorder amongst the troops of the Holy Roman Emperor, who pursued the French force too quickly and lost their cohesion, that was a prime cause of their defeat at the battle of Bouvines in 1214.

The ideally conducted charge saw the squadrons formed up in dense order, 'so tightly packed', say a number of sources, 'that a gauntlet could not fall between them', advancing steadily so that all arrived against the enemy together and, through sheer weight and impetus, broke their line and put them to flight. This did not always happen. Perfecting the timing of a charge was a very difficult thing to achieve. If the enemy held, or even if they fled, the impetus of the charge would wane and the cohesion of the squadron break down, at which point the knights became vulnerable to counter-attack. William of Tyre relates how after driving off a large force of Saracens during an engagement in 1179, the knights of Baldwin IV of Jerusalem set to looting the field. The main body of the Muslim army appeared and:

> ... when the knights saw the enemy, whom they had considered defeated, streaming in their direction with renewed strength, they had neither time nor opportunity to form up their units and get into position according to military discipline. They fought in disorder, offered resistance for a time and withstood the onslaught bravely. But in the end the odds were too much against them, because they had to fight spread out and in disorder, and could not help each other. They were shamefully put to flight.

But the knightly charge was not a one-shot weapon. In most cases the squadrons of knights would be able to fall back and regroup. In tournament *lices* or 'lists', barriers or earthwork enclosures marked out the area of *recets*, safe areas where tired and wounded knights might retire, rest and collect fresh weapons and horses. On the battlefield a good commander ensured that he had reserves, fresh squadrons of knights or, as in the case of the Order of the Templars, sergeants and squires, who could ride forward to relieve the first line or launch charges of their own – a series of hammer blows against the enemy. The composition of the late medieval *lance* in the *Compagnies d'Ordonnance* of France and Burgundy, of which more in the next chapter, had a fully armoured *gendarme* or man-at-arms supported by between two and four less well-equipped cavalry. Footsoldiers were often used in a similar way, particularly during the crusades where their solid defence and firepower could hold the Saracens at a distance until the knights were ready to charge and the Saracens had begun to tire, or whilst the knights prepared themselves to charge again, collecting spare lances, shields and fresh mounts from their squires. There might even be an opportunity for a knight to remove his helmet and take some air and refreshment before he rejoined the fray.

Even with the enemy broken the careful knight would be in no hurry to break ranks in pursuit. Apart from the danger of the enemy's having reserves they might be conducting a feigned flight. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurred at Hastings in 1066 where the Norman knights turned pretending to flee in order to draw out the English infantry from their shieldwall, which had proven almost invulnerable to the Norman charges. Much ink has been spilt over whether this was a tactic of which the knight was capable. Many believe that such a manoeuvre required a level of discipline, morale and cohesion that could only be produced in a professional, standing force of cavalry that drilled on a regular basis. It was indeed a dangerous manoeuvre, tricky to perform and always with the risk that a vigorous pursuit might see the ruse turning into a real rout. The feigned flight also broke up that all important cohesion and the turn and counter-attack would certainly require careful timing, and was not guaranteed to be successful. The poem the *Carmen de Haestingae Proelio*, perhaps the earliest account of the battle of Hastings, written within a few years of the battle, makes this clear. As the Norman horse turned and began to cut down the pursuing English the latter 'prevailing by their number, repulsed the enemy and by their might compelled him to run – and then the flight which had first been a ruse became enforced by valour. The Normans fled, their shields covered their backs!' But just because a tactic is difficult to get right and risky to perform does not mean it was beyond the capabilities of the knight to perform. The question is one of training. It is clear that the tactic was practised and performed by Carolingian horsemen. At a muster of the Carolingian army at Worms in 842, the horsemen performed a sort of training exercise:

> ... teams of equal numbers first rushed forth from both sides and raced at full speed against each other as if they were going to attack. Then one side would turn back, pretending that they wished to escape from their pursuers to their companions under the protection of their shields. But then they would turn around again and try to pursue those from whom they had been fleeing...

As was noted in the Introduction, the culture and background of the ninth-century warrior noble was not all that different from his 11th-century descendant. If the former had the skill to perform such a manoeuvre why should the knight have been any less well prepared and skilled?

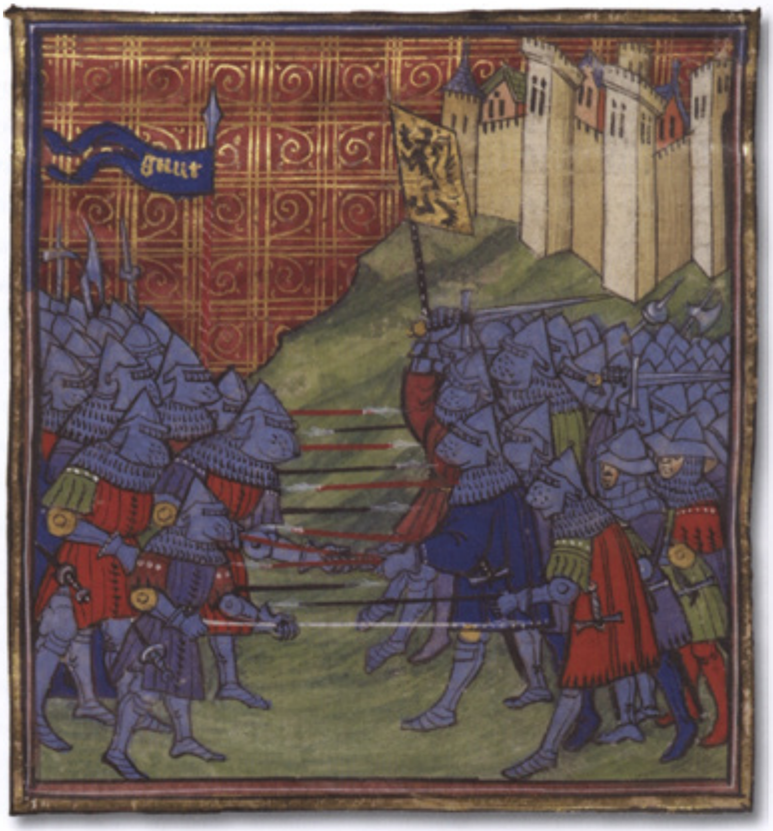
DISMOUNTED TACTICS

Contrary to the popular image the man-at-arms was to be found on foot as often as he was on horseback. Sometimes, it is true, this was because of the loss of his mount, but at some point or another the knights of almost all polities fought dismounted as a tactical choice. They might comprise the bulk of the foot, as the English man-at-arms was to do in the Hundred Years War, or be used as a leaven for non-knightly footsoldiers, or *pedites*. In all of the major engagements fought by Anglo-Norman armies the knights dismounted and joined the ranks of the foot. Their sense of *esprit de corps*, their greater experience of combat and the protection offered by their superior armour made the formation physically stronger and their presence also hardened the resolve of the men they fought alongside. Whilst waiting for his brother Robert Curthose to invade England in 1101 Henry I went through the ranks of the *fyrd*, the levied militia drawn from the able-bodied male population between 16 and 60, and 'taught them how, in meeting the attack of the knights, to defend with their shields and return their blows'. At Tinchebrai in 1106 'the king and the duke, with great part of their troops, fought on foot, that they might make a determined stand...' whilst at Brémule Henry dismounted his knights 'that they might fight more bravely on foot'. The two leaders of the Flemish contingent at Courtrai, the knights Guy de Namur and Willem van Jülich, both took their places on foot amongst the guildsmen, indicating their willingness to share their fate. The other key example of dismounted knights in battle, of course, is the tactics developed by the English from the battle of Dupplin Moor in 1332. Whilst English armies were generally all horsed, men-at-arms and archers alike, they dismounted for battle, the knights and men-at-arms supported by increasingly large numbers of archers. This was to be the normal deployment for over 150 years.

In all cases the emphasis was on standing firm. Just as with the cavalry charge, remaining *ordinate* was all important. Against a mounted enemy it was absolutely essential. A gap in the ranks could allow a horseman in amongst the body leaving a hole into which others could follow. Advising his men as they waited for the French to attack at Courtrai in 1302 the Flemish leader Jan van Renesse told them, 'Do not let the formation break ... slay both man and horse to the ground... Any man who penetrates our ranks will be killed.' Obviously the formation could not be too dense because the men's weapons, particularly hafted weapons such as the pollaxe, would require some room to wield. For the same reason the battle lines cannot have been more than five or six ranks deep; anyone further back would not be able to use his weapons, and whilst having reserve lines would be useful, pushing from behind in the fashion of a rugby scrum would not.

Mutual support in combat was also important. The Italian commentator Filippo Villani describes how the men-at-arms who travelled into Italy seeking employment during the periods of truce in the Hundred Years War, the English *condottieri*, took the field. He writes that:

> ... their mode of fighting in the field was almost always afoot, as they assigned their horses to their pages. Keeping themselves in almost circular formation, every two took a lance, carrying it in a manner in which one waits for a boar with a boar-spear. So bound and compact, with lowered lances they marched with slow steps towards the enemy, making a terrible outcry – and their ranks could hardly be pried apart.



Men-at-arms fighting on foot, late 14th century. For much of this period, and contrary to the popular view, knights and men-at-arms dismounted to fight. (© British Library)

A slow advance ensured that cohesion was kept. The French chronicler Froissart records that on finding the Scots during the 1327 expedition the English dismounted, formed into battles and were ordered by their commanders 'to advance toward the enemy in slow time keeping their ranks [*tout bellement, le petit pas*]'. Similarly, although around two centuries earlier, Wace writes that the Normans advanced against the English at Hastings 'in close order at their slow pace [*serreement, lor petit pas*]'. Remaining stationary was a more certain way of maintaining cohesion. Forces on foot invariably took the defensive, standing their ground and awaiting the enemy attack. They might also strengthen their position by using fieldworks, such as the stakes employed by Henry V's army at Agincourt, or the pits and potholes dug by the English at Morlaix in 1342 or the ditches and caltrops employed by the Portuguese at Aljubarrota in 1385.

TRAINING

Close cooperation between knights, complex tactical manoeuvre, weapon handling and horsemanship were all essential skills for the knight, but they were also skills that had to be taught and maintained by practice. In a permanent standing army, drill and training are an almost constant part of the life of the soldier and officer. However medieval armies were very far removed from being permanent standing armies. How then did the warrior learn his trade? Some of it must have been on the job, so to speak, through the experience of battle but, as we shall see in the next chapter, battles were rare and a knight might go through his life without participating in a major engagement.

The first thing to take into account, so obvious that it is often forgotten, is that the knight had only one role in life, to act as a warrior and support his lord in combat. Thus the majority of his time was taken up with martial pursuits. In particular young and unmarried warriors, the *bachelors*, *tirones* or *juvenes*, had no other obligations and groups of them, like the household of Henry II of England's son Henry, the so-called 'Young King',[*] were renowned for spending their time and wealth travelling between tournaments and wars. Such a focus on martial pursuits was expected of young warriors. In one of the more popular epics the Count of Narbonne sends six of his sevens sons away, instructing them to make their fortunes by attaching themselves to noble households and serving their lords in battle, or reclaiming land from the heathen. The *Speculum regale* says that 'if you feel that it is important to be well trained in these activities, go through the exercise twice a day, if it is convenient; but let no day pass, except holidays, without practising this drill at least once; for it is counted proper for all kingsmen to master this art and, moreover, it must be mastered if it is to be of service'. The martial arts were at the heart of the knightly calling and life.

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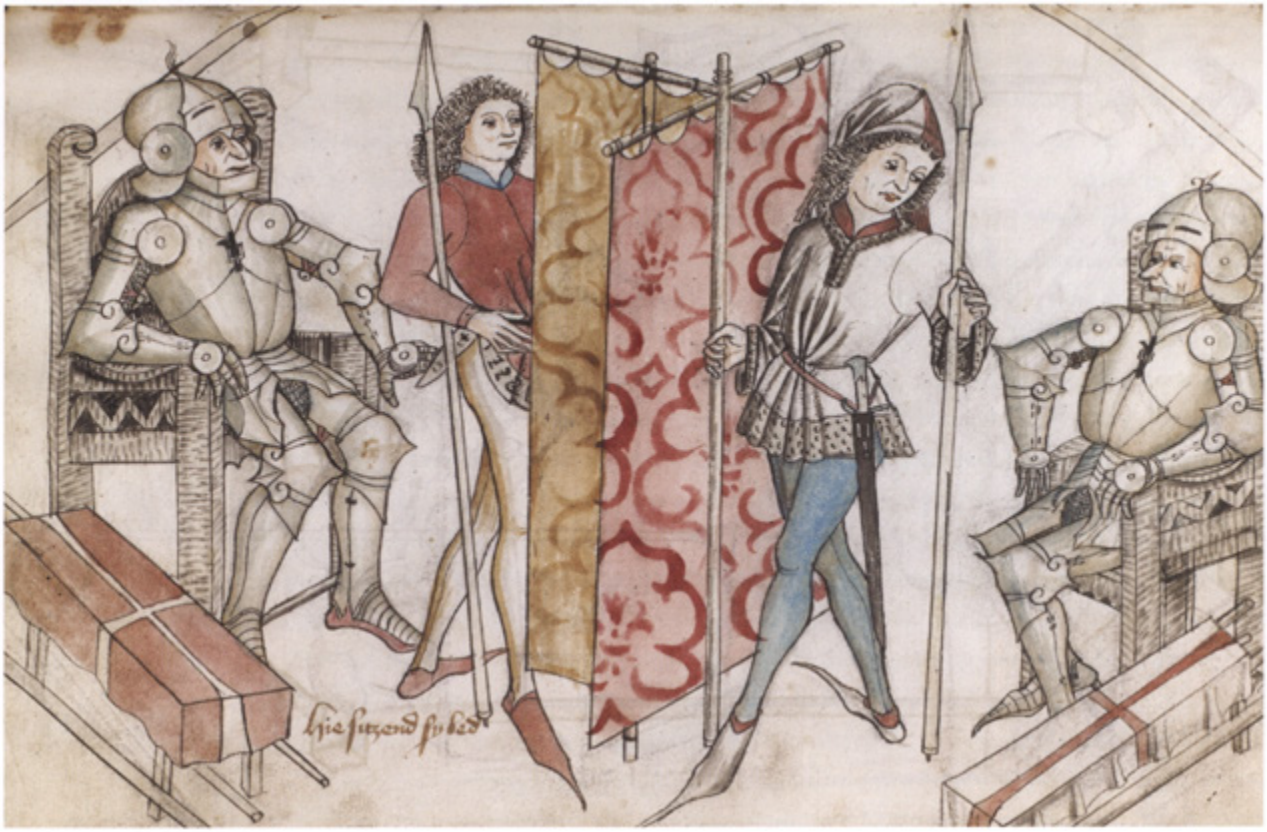
[*] The Young King was Henry II's second son (but the first to reach adulthood), brother to Richard and John. Earning the soubriquet 'the Young King' because he was crowned in his father's lifetime in imitation of French royal practice, he died before his father, in 1183.

That life began at an early age. William Marshal was 12 when he was sent to William de Tancarville's household, and he served as a squire for eight years before being knighted. Unfortunately his biographer chooses to gloss over these early years, presumably as they were unable to offer much glory in which he could bathe his subject, so we do not know whether de Tancarville taught the boy himself or, as is more likely, the task fell to one of the knights of his *familia*.

Everyone knows that the knight began his training as a squire under another knight, learning his trade from the ground up. Effectively, the boy was an apprentice knight, retaining his social status and rank. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* the squire ranks in second place in the hierarchy of pilgrims, right behind his father the knight. He is well dressed, with curled hair and embroidered gown; he is most definitely not a servant. It is true that squires were expected to share in some of the care of his knight's horses and armour and serve him at table, but these duties, and in particular the latter, were a distinction rather than a lowly duty. This is why Chaucer remarks that the squire 'carved before his father at the table' alongside his knowledge of poetry and dance and singing and rhetoric. All of this was part of his education, in which he was taught not only the practical care of his equipment and his horse, but also the social graces and arts as well as martial ones.

Princes did not, in general, get sent to other courts. It was generally considered politically unsafe to send heirs away and so a series of men were employed to school the princes within their own households: *nutritii*, a sort of male nursemaid for their earliest years and then *magistri*, masters, the term being used for both the tutors who taught academic subjects and those who taught martial pursuits. William Marshal performed this role for Henry the Young King, Henry II promising, we are told, to do William much good in return for the care and instruction of the monarch's eldest son. He remained as an adviser to the Young King after the latter's knighting and, indeed, after both of them had ceased to be *juvenes*, continued to provide advice and training to the Young King's household on the tournament circuit and in battle until the prince's death in 1183.

Whilst most *magistri* are lost to us, particularly as the term is used broadly and with no distinction and they leave little evidence other than occasional payments in account rolls, we do know a fair amount about one particular group of the late 14th and 15th centuries because of the survival of the fighting manuals that they produced. Men like Johannes Lichtenauer, Sigmund Ringeck and Hans Talhoffer, all southern German masters, and north Italians like Fiore dei Liberi and Filippo Vadi left tantalizing details of themselves in their manuscripts. Fiore, for example, tells us that he was born in the northern Italian region of Aquileia, the son of a minor nobleman, probably around 1350. He left home at an early age, with the desire to learn the martial arts. Travelling widely he studied under many masters of arms in both Italy and



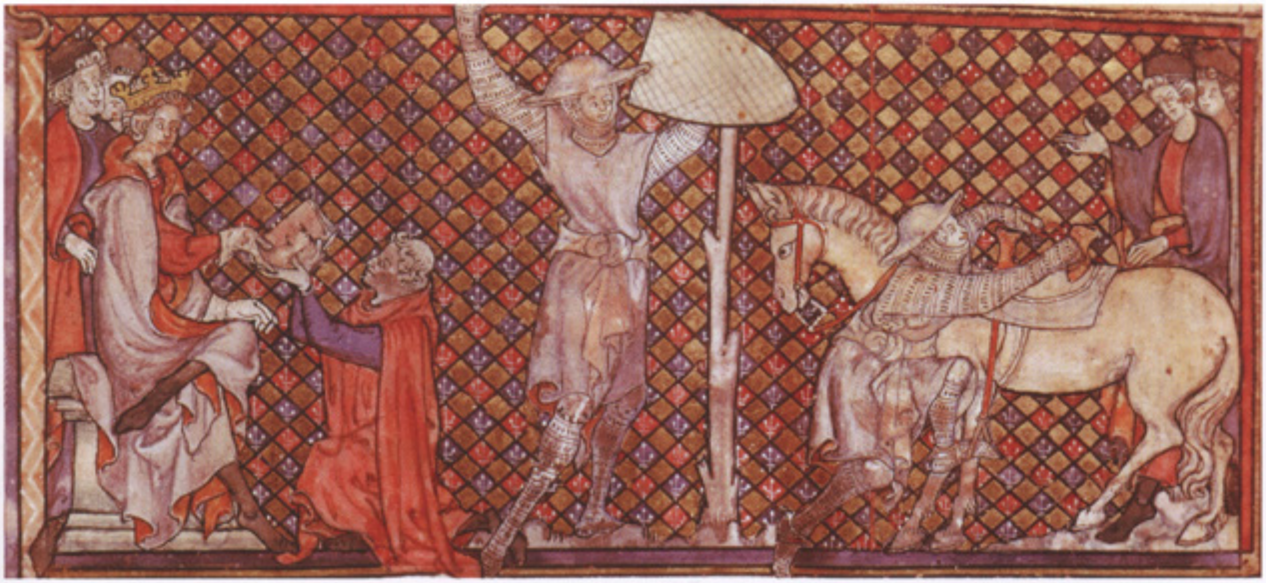
Knights awaiting the start of a judicial combat. (The Danish Royal Library)

Germany, using the family's wealth and resources to do so. He went on to become a master in his own right, and lists a number of his pupils, all of whom were knights or squires, and the duels they had fought and won. He claims to have been a student and teacher of martial arts for 40 years, and had fought five duels in protection of his own honour by the time he settled down in around 1409 to write and illustrate his *Flos Duellorum* at the request of the Marquis of Ferrare, Nicolo III d'Este.

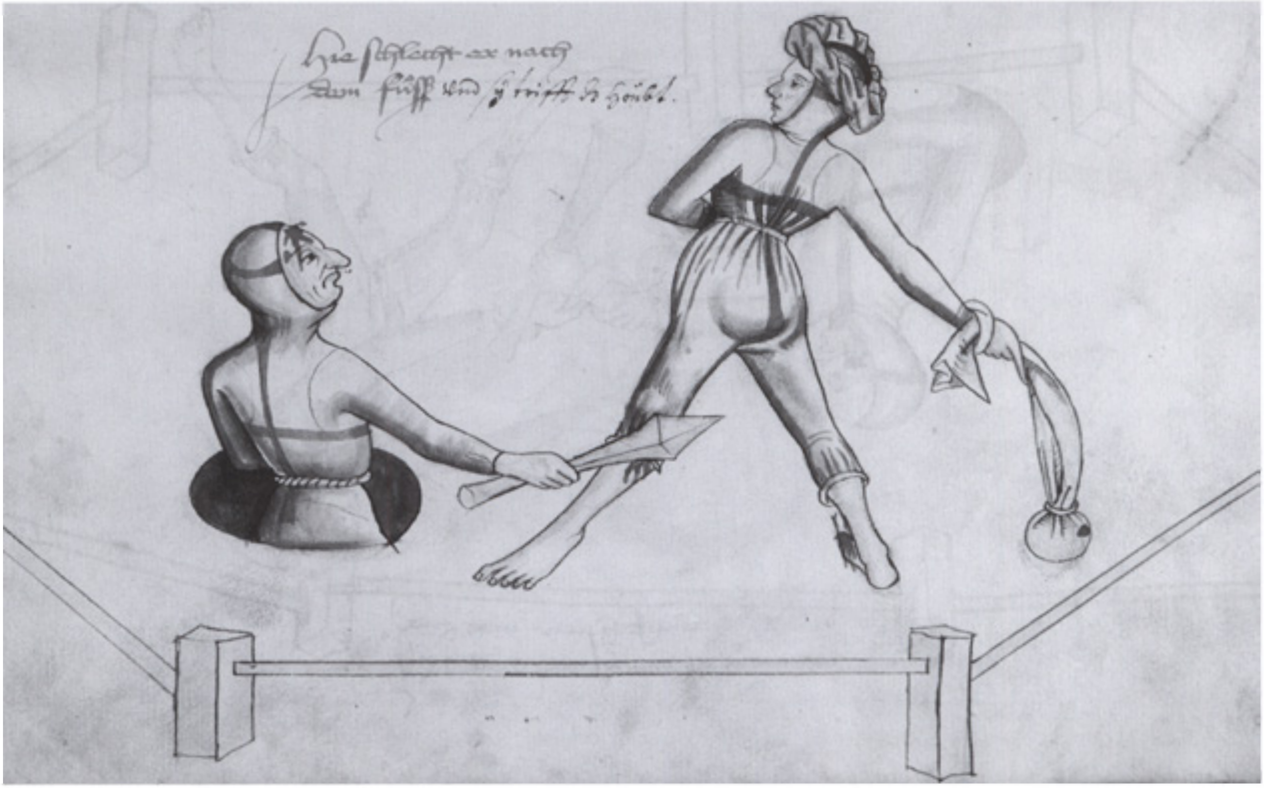
Whilst these men were performing a very similar service to that performed by William Marshal in the Young King's *familia*, training their employers in the martial arts, theirs was a very different relationship. Unlike Marshal, who was a mentor and comrade to princes and kings, these men appear to have had a much more professional outlook and a much more specific remit within court circles. Many of them seem to have been employed to fight as champions in the judicial combats that were still an integral part of the legal system of the lands of the region. Talhoffer certainly served as an umpire in such duels fought in Zürich in the 1450s. The focus of the manuals such men produced is invariably single combat against an opponent equipped in the same manner as the reader. Talhoffer's book makes this very clear. He begins his work by outlining the seven causes for challenging an opponent to a duel – murder, treason, heresy, urging disloyalty to one's lord, betrayal, falsehood, and the use of a maiden or lady – before going to lay out the procedure for bringing the complaint and setting up the fight itself. One of the first plates depicts two combatants in full armour sitting within a fenced arena with their banners and their attendants, separated by screens. They would look very much like boxers except for the armour and the coffin each has brought.

Talhoffer's teaching was not strictly for nobles. His school, set up in Zürich around 1450, almost certainly had burghers and other non-knightly (but by no means low class) adherents as well as nobles, men equally protective of their honour and status and willing to fight for it. His *Fechtbuch* also includes other forms of duel, fought with a variety of weapons, armoured and unarmoured, mounted and dismounted. Perhaps the most bizarre is a series of plates dealing with the fight between a man and a woman, the former standing waist-deep in a pit whilst the woman stands above him armed with a rock in a sock, or rather wrapped in a veil! The man aims to tip the woman into the pit whilst the woman tries to drag him out. As with all of these judicial combats the victor was reckoned to be in the right, their victory having been granted by God in recognition of the justice of their cause.

Not all of the texts left to us are as specific about their aims as Talhoffer's, but it is still the case that these masters appear to have been employed to provide quite specific combat training for the one-to-one duel. There is no indication that they taught broader concepts necessary for the battlefield, and the focus of most of the texts is on dismounted combat with the longsword.



A knight trains at the *pell*. He uses a stave rather than a sword, but is wearing full armour, perhaps in order to condition himself to its weight. (The Art Archive)


Hie schlecht er nach
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Husband and wife in trial by combat, as illustrated in Talhoffer's work. (The Danish Royal Library)

The first skill the young squire was taught must have been wrestling. No doubt this developed naturally, the inevitable brawls between such youths being, if not actively encouraged, then certainly tolerated as being useful object lessons. Grappling is invariably the first topic in the *Fechtbuch* systems. It builds strength and balance and also teaches the basics of footwork, distance and timing which lay at the heart of the use of other weapons. Weapon handling itself would have been taught against a *pell* – a man-high stake driven into the ground. The idea here was that the squire should learn a sense of distance and to lay blows onto a target accurately. The *pell* was a very ancient training tool. The fourth-century writer Vegetius, in his book on the military arts *De Re Militari*, advocates its use, writing that:

> ... against the post, as if against an adversary the recruit trained himself using the foil and hurdle like a sword and shield, so that now he aimed at as it were the head and face, now threatened the flanks, then tried to cut the hamstrings and legs, backed off, came on, sprang and aimed at the post with every method of attack and art of combat, as though it were an actual opponent. In this training care was taken that the recruit drew himself up to inflict wounds without exposing any part of himself to a blow.

A similar device, but for mounted combat, was the *quintain*. Comprising at its most simple a target on a post, or in its more complex form a swivelling arm with the target on one end and a weight on the other, the aim was again to teach accuracy with the lance and skill at riding. A clean strike to the target would cause the arm to swing, which encouraged the rider to spur on past the target or receive a hefty blow to the back of the head. A similar idea lay behind riding at the ring, where the target was replaced by a ring that the rider had to thread his lance through.

As well as these solo exercises there would have been opportunities for sparring matches in which combatants paired up and fought with wooden wasters, staffs of whalebone or blunted weapons. Again, the *Speculum regale* emphasizes the importance of such drills, encouraging the young household warrior to go out regularly with sword and shield or buckler, choosing a companion

> ... who likes to drill with you and whom you know to be well trained to fight... In this game you should strive to learn suitable thrusts and such counterstrokes as are good, necessary, and convenient. Learn precisely how to cover yourself with the shield, so that you may be able to guard well when you have to deal with a foeman.

Whilst such drills could be encouraged as serious practice they were also pursued as forms of martial entertainment, games in which the young warriors could amuse themselves, again reminding us that martial pursuits were very much at the heart of these men's lives. It seems the squires lost no opportunity for a test of martial skill, and both the romances and chronicles are littered with references to the rough and tumble of the young *tirones*. There was even a name for these impromptu scraps – *bohord* or *béhourds*.

It was not just squires who played such games. Richard the Lionheart, whilst staying on the island of Sicily on his way to the Holy Land, took canes from a passing peasant as weapons for a *béhourd* whilst out riding with members of his household and some French knights. Despite their spontaneous nature, such play fights were an invaluable way in which the young warrior could hone his skills and, since the protagonists invariably seemed to divide into teams, cooperation with other warriors.

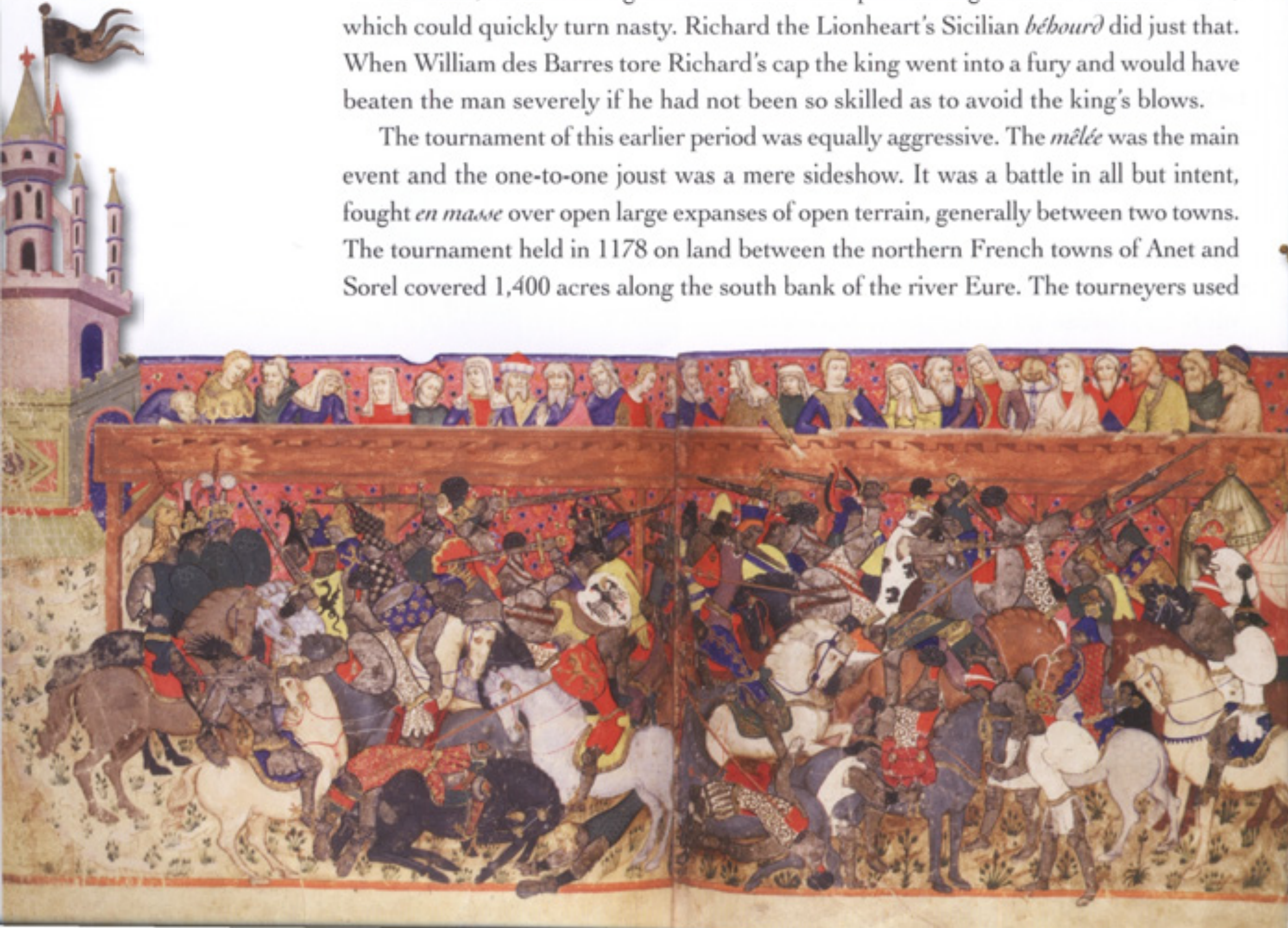
Mask from a Roman cavalry 'sports' helmet. This kind of parade armour was regularly used for the cavalry *ludi* (literally 'games'), which were both training for battle and an opportunity to show off one's skill, much like the medieval tournament. (Bridgeman Art Library)

THE TOURNAMENT

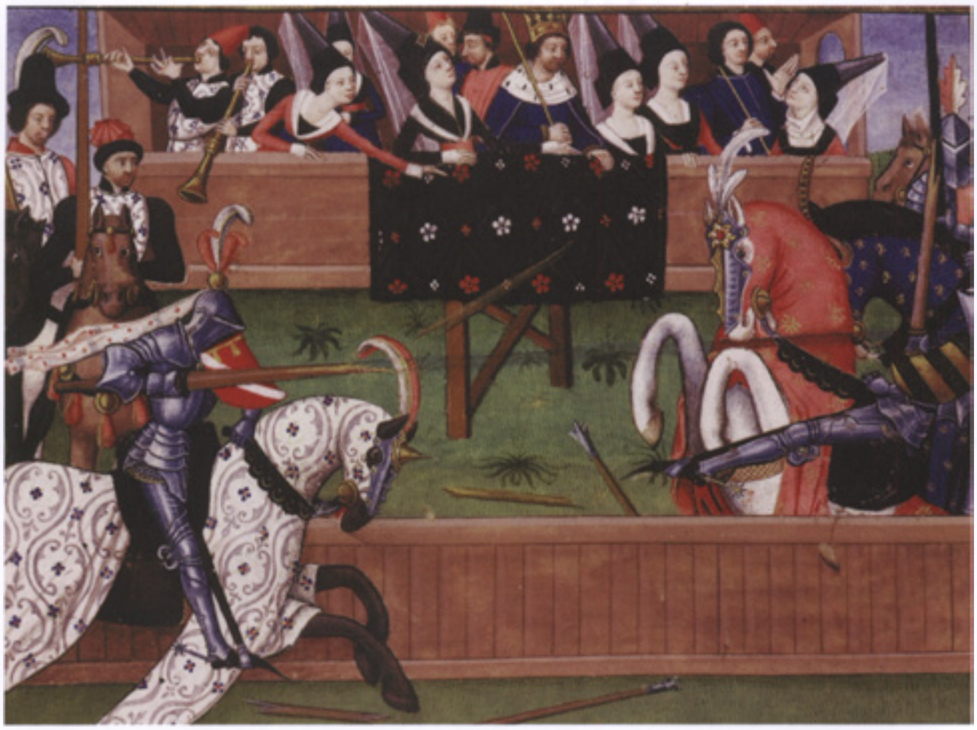
Such games had their formal equivalent, of course, in the tournament, and the tournament of the 12th and 13th centuries was indeed an excellent training ground for war. Its origins can be seen in the *béhourd* and the similar wargames that we have already seen Carolingian horsemen performing at Worms in 842. As always, it is tempting to find a classical root for these sports. Roman cavalry units would conduct *hippika gymnasia* or *militari ludi* (literally 'military games') often in elaborate armour, during which they would perform the evolutions and manoeuvres they would use on the field. The remains of an inscription from Lambaesis in north Africa records the speech made by the Emperor Hadrian following the military exercises of the garrison there. His comments concentrate on the tightness of the formation and the skill with which they handle their weapons, saying of one unit that they performed a manoeuvre that 'has the appearance of real warfare'. What he had witnessed was still very much a display of skill at arms; there is something of the theatre about such classical games. In the full *hippika gymnasia* the cavalrymen would dress in finely decorated armour with masks in the form of Greeks or Amazons.

However, the classical games lacked the competitive edge of the medieval events, which could quickly turn nasty. Richard the Lionheart's Sicilian *béhourd* did just that. When William des Barres tore Richard's cap the king went into a fury and would have beaten the man severely if he had not been so skilled as to avoid the king's blows.

The tournament of this earlier period was equally aggressive. The *mêlée* was the main event and the one-to-one joust was a mere sideshow. It was a battle in all but intent, fought *en masse* over open large expanses of open terrain, generally between two towns. The tournament held in 1178 on land between the northern French towns of Anet and Sorel covered 1,400 acres along the south bank of the river Eure. The tourneyers used



The *mêlée* tournament was far closer to real battle than the one-to-one joust. This mid-14th-century image fails to show that such engagements could be fought over many miles. (© British Library)



A late medieval joust. Originally a warm-up show, by the 15th century the joust had become the main event, with participants scoring points for breaking lances and the accuracy of their blows. Such sport required quite different skills to the *mêlée*. (The Art Archive)

hedgerows, barns, hills and the town of Anet itself (although strictly the town was out of bounds) to launch ambushes and utilize local advantage, just like a real battle.

Unlike a real battle there was no overarching strategic plan; after lining up opposite each other the two sides would simply charge, breaking into the individual households, which seem to have conducted their own individual fights. There was no winning side either. At the end of the day the great lords might gather together and discuss between themselves which knight had performed with the greatest prowess; he would then awarded a prize of some kind, such as the giant pike offered at Pleurs in 1178 or the live bear that was to be a prize in the tournament planned for Hounslow in 1215.

A more venal measure of victory lay in the capture of opposing knights, whose armour and mount could be seized and who might be expected to pay a ransom. This may account for why William spent so much time grappling with his foes; grabbing bridles and tearing off helmets was a more certain means of ensuring an opponent's surrender than knocking him from his horse with a lance or bludgeoning him insensible with the sword. Of course the greater the status of the captive the greater the prize and the greater the glory and so the princes, nobles and lords were key targets. Whilst the household might be protecting their lord they would also be looking for the opportunity to take captives in their own right. The Young King and members of his retinue seem to have thought that William Marshal was too fond of seeking out his own ransoms, neglecting to protect his prince. Whilst Marshal's biographer glosses over the details he does include one occasion where the prince admonishes William for leaving him alone on the battlefield to pursue his own glory, and it appears that this lay at the heart of the rift between the two in 1182 which saw Marshal leave the prince's service for a spell.

The *mêlée* tournament was, then, an opportunity for the individual knight to practise and demonstrate his individual combat skills and for military households to learn to act together, and it reinforced their sense of cohesion and cooperation. It was also a place in which they could develop small-unit tactics in relatively safety. Just as with the other great knightly recreation, the hunt (which we discuss in more detail below), by ranging across the hills, fields and through the woods of the tournament field the knight would learn much about the control of his horse and the use of terrain for advantage. William Marshal's contemporary Count Philip of Flanders would purposefully enter the *mêlée* late, after the other households and teams had become scattered and disordered, sweeping the field and making easy pickings of the tired and preoccupied knights. The Young King's household suffered from this tactic on a number of occasions before they adopted it themselves. Although this was primarily a scheme for the tournament field, it might also have taught those who saw it a lesson about the value of retaining a reserve on the battlefield.

The joust, which began as a warm-up exercise and an opportunity for young knights to show their worth without being outclassed and picked off by more experienced tourneyers, allowed the warrior to show his individual prowess to an appreciative audience. By the 14th century it was the dominant form of tournament, in no small part because it was much easier to control, required much less land and was far less damaging on property and the purse. All of the action took place in front of the spectators, as opposed to the *mêlée* where they would only see the initial massed charge and then glimpses of the action as the teams spread out across the countryside. This made it much easier to integrate into the pageants that were very much a part of courtly life at this time. As a result the tournament became far more a sport than a true combat, with the rules and equipment evolving in order to minimize the risk to the participants. The changes meant that different skill sets were required: William Marshal's rough and ready grappling techniques would not have seen him win here. Even with the development of foot tourneys, in which combatants used sword, pollaxe and, by the beginning of the 17th century, pike, such competitions became increasingly removed from the real experience of battle.

There is no doubt that tournaments and the various off-shoots had a role in maintaining and developing the skills of the knight – certainly Richard I thought so, reversing his father's ban on tournaments in England in part because it had left the

English knights at a disadvantage against their continental foes. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to see them wholly or even primarily as training grounds. It would be equally wrong to draw too clear a distinction between them and 'real' battles. For the tourneying knight as much could be at stake in terms of wealth, honour, liberty and life as when he was on military campaign. The desire for ransoms and plunder was as strong on the battlefield as it was on that of the tournament, and the dangers of injury or death were perhaps only slightly less great. When the 14th-century knight and writer on chivalry Geoffrey de Charny discusses where the greatest glory lies for a knight, whether in the joust, the *mêlée* or the pitched battle, the last of these is seen as more honourable not because the risks were greater but because it offered the opportunity to show prowess with the greatest range of weapons. Equally the 12th-century writer Roger of Hoveden's comment that a novice knight learned at the tournament what to expect in battle, 'the cracking of teeth, the sight of his own blood', is as much an indicator of the dangers and risks of the tournament as it is indicative of the tournament as a valid preparation of war. As in any contact sport injury was common; broken fingers and noses, fractured limbs and skulls, bruises and cuts would have been the norm. The knight and poet Ulrich von Lichtenstein, a real knight who was a key figure in the German tournament circuit in the 1250s, lost a finger after being struck by a lance, whilst the English knight Robert Fitz Neal suffered permanent brain damage after a blow to the head in a tournament around 1350 as did a son of Philippe III of France in 1279. Deaths were rare, however, even in the early days of tournaments before specialized armour and lances with coronels. More often than not they were caused by men falling and being trampled beneath the hooves of the horses, like Henry II's fourth son Duke Geoffrey of Brittany in 1185, rather than by the blows of the opponents. Nevertheless, accidents could still happen; as late as 1559 King Henry II of France was killed at a joust when splinters from his opponent's lance pierced his visor.

BATTLEFIELD EXPERIENCE

Whilst the tournament held some lessons for the new knight it still could not fully prepare him for the rigours of campaigning. Pitched battle might indeed be rare, but there were ample opportunities to learn in the skirmishes and raids that were a regular part of medieval warfare, particularly during the 11th and 12th centuries when private conflicts and feuding were endemic or in the almost continuous campaigns across France and its border in the 14th and 15th centuries. That series of conflicts known as the Hundred Years War also saw the schooling of a whole new demographic of

AN ENGLISH CAPTAIN IN ITALY: JOHN HAWKWOOD

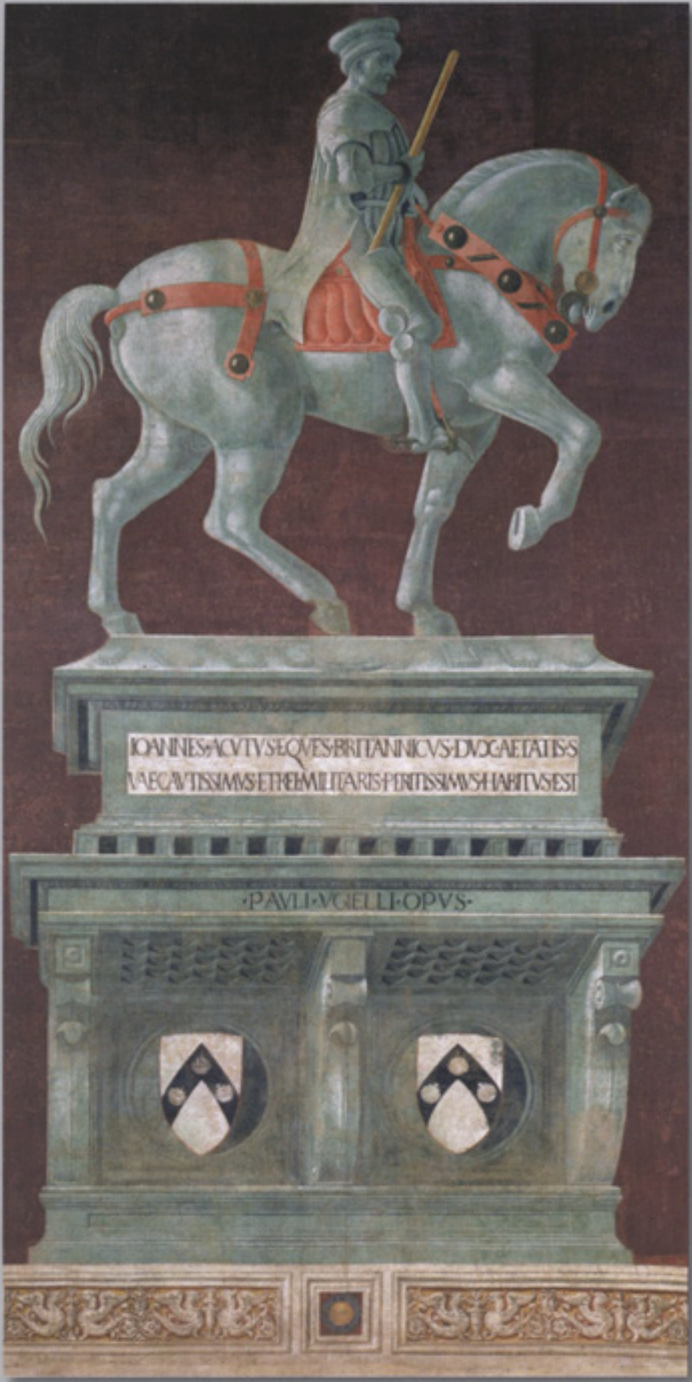
The way in which armies and garrisons were recruited during the Hundred Years War ensured that when peace broke out in 1360 there were large numbers of soldiers, unemployed and without prospects, loose in the realm of France. These banded together, forming independent companies who made war on their own account, seeking to keep themselves fed and paid. Whilst most of these *routiers* were reabsorbed into the English and French forces for the Castilian campaign and the resumption of hostilities in 1370, a substantial number had made their way south, entering a new theatre: that of Italy. Here they joined Italians, Germans and other professional soldiers as *condottiere*, men under contract.

Perhaps the most famous of these was Sir John Hawkwood. It is probable that, after initially being apprenticed as a tailor, he began his military career as an archer in the Breton campaigns of 1342–43, perhaps serving alongside his neighbours in the retinue of the Earl of Northampton. He may have served in the Hundred Years War on the Crécy campaign in 1346 and at Poitiers in 1356, but he does not appear in the sources until the Treaty of Brétigny brought a temporary peace between France and England in 1360.

Hawkwood was a member of the largest of the bands of unemployed soldiers that ravaged France during this period, the Great Company, which focused its attention on the city of Avignon, home to Pope Innocent VI. Here they effectively held the pontiff to ransom until they were bought off and split up, part heading for the war in Castile and the rest crossing the Alps into Italy, serving Innocent in his war against the lord of Milan.

Hawkwood went to Italy, serving as one of 19 *corporals* – the term used for a fully armoured man-at-arms – in an English company under the command of the German captain Albert Sterz. They quickly gained a reputation for fighting on foot, with a ferocity unusual for foreign mercenaries, being highly manoeuvrable and having a talent for night attacks, traits that Hawkwood was to continue to show throughout his career. They also became known for rapaciousness, supplementing their contracted income by raiding the lands and extorting money from the towns through which they passed.

In 1363 the White Company, as this band was called, was contracted by Pisa for its war against Florence. After initial successes, in which the company once again proved itself, the city of Pisa elected Hawkwood to be captain of their entire army. From here his career went from strength to strength and, whilst not always militarily successful, the captain nonetheless showed himself to have a good strategic eye. He also showed great cunning (perhaps the origin for the Italian rendering of his surname, *Acuto,* meaning 'the sharp or astute'), a quality essential in the politically charged warfare of Italy. The same astuteness was to serve him in good stead personally. He was as able to intimidate and negotiate a victory as win one on the field, and used the same tactics for his own personal gain – cities that failed to be his friend often paid the price when his companies raided their territory. Moreover he was able to ride the currents of Italian's shifting alliances for his own personal ends. He switched allegiance from the Duchy of Milan to the Papacy in 1372, and returned to the duchy's service in 1377, and finally contracted with Florence to lead its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Paolo Uccello's fresco of Sir John Hawkwood, the most successful of the English *condottiere*. (Bridgeman Art Library)

armies in 1390, his victories there earning him a heroic reputation as the city's saviour. Every new contract ensured greater profit and honours.

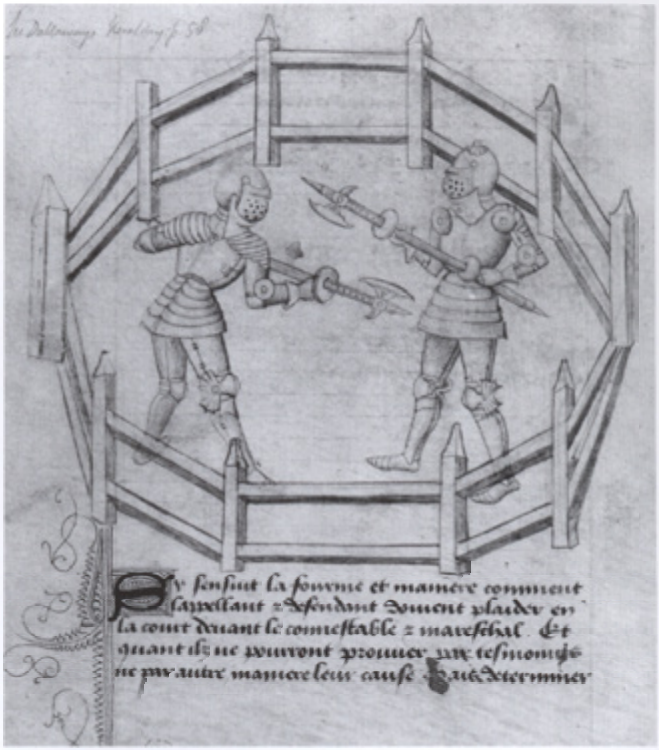
Hawkwood's success netted him a huge income and extensive property. In 1381, for example, he earned 67,533 florins, only about 3,000 less than that generated by the city of Lucca, with its population of 30,000 people, in the same year. The money was lent to his comrades, spent on supplies, but also invested in the cities for whom he served and the properties he owned in both Italy and England.

Hawkwood never ceased to be a servant of the English crown. Throughout his Italian career he maintained close contacts with England. His contracts invariably included clauses barring him from being engaged against the allies of the English crown, he participated in the arrangements for the marriage of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, Edward III's son, to the daughter of Bernabò Visconti, the ruler of Milan, and he acted as Richard II's ambassador in the region, negotiating with almost all the major players in the area. In the last years of his life he prepared to return to England, but died before he could do so. Richard II tried to have his body returned, but in the end he was buried in Florence beneath Uccello's famous painting. Looking at it there is little to suggest the Englishman who had started life as a tailor; Uccello's Hawkwood is every inch the Italian captain.

warrior. Some, like the French captain Bertrand du Guesclin, were at the lowest end of the noble ranks, what in English parlance might be called the gentry, whilst others were commoners. Without access to masters and tutors in their youth, or to the wealth to pursue noble pursuits like tournaments, this martial experience must surely have developed out of their years on campaign. Men such as the mercenary captain Sir John Hawkwood or Sir Robert Knolles, who began his military career as an archer and worked his way up to being one of the foremost English captains, became great warriors and leaders almost solely through the practice of arms.

Much of that knowledge could have come from nowhere else. As we have noted, the tournaments taught small-unit tactics but there was no higher level of command and control, so they provided no real opportunity for the young nobleman to learn how to command whole armies and marshal them in the field. For that campaigning was essential, as was the make up of the *conroi* and retinue. Within these units young knights would have had access to the experience of older knights. William Marshal is to be seen proffering military advice not only to his charge the Young King but also to his charge's brothers and indeed his father Henry II. At Crécy in 1346 the Black Prince, aged 16, had command of the vanguard, fighting in the fiercest part of the *mêlée*. His father, in the rear with a reserve, when asked if he would attack in support of his son replied that the boy should win his spurs. It is clear, however, that the Black Prince was not wholly alone and that with him in the vanguard were experienced knights – men who had served in the wars against Scotland and in the early French campaigns, including the Earl of Northampton and Bartholomew Burghersh senior, the latter of whom had served in Edward II's 1315 Scottish campaign. As we shall see, the nobility on any campaign formed a 'brain's trust' of strategic and tactical thinking and of military experience that the commander might draw upon.

There is no doubt that the classical works of Vegetius and also the first-century Roman aristocrat Frontinus' *Strategemata*, a collection of strategies and tactics, were popular works, not only copied in Latin but also translated into the vernacular. Edward I's wife commissioned a translation into French for her husband before he went on crusade in 1270, whilst Henry II's father, Geoffrey of Anjou, is recorded as having studied a copy during the siege of Montreuil-Bellay. A bishop of Auxerre in France during the 12th century would gather local knights together so that he and they could discuss the work. The same works also formed the basis for a number of the high and late medieval works on chivalry including those of Honoré de Bouvet, Christine de Pisan and Geoffrey de Charny. Much of what they include in these writings, however – including the placing of fortifications, logistics and strategic thought – may be dismissed as common sense, things that a commander would know for himself. One has to ask, for example, whether Edward I really needed a copy of Vegetius to tell him of the importance of his army having food and water, or that he should not fight a battle unless he felt he had a distinct advantage? Other material found in Vegetius was not adopted, in particular the raising, training and organization of a standing army of infantry – in other words, things that a medieval commander would need to refer to in order to learn, but for which he had little use, not having the underlying social and cultural structures necessary to implement them. The popularity of a work like Vegetius might lie as much in the fact that his was the only available classical work on the practice of war as in any usefulness. Classical writings were held in high esteem as the learning of a superior age, and knowledge of them was an indicator of erudition and intelligence. At the very least, it was felt that such didactic works, like the *Speculum regale*, were something that a lord or king should display amongst his possessions.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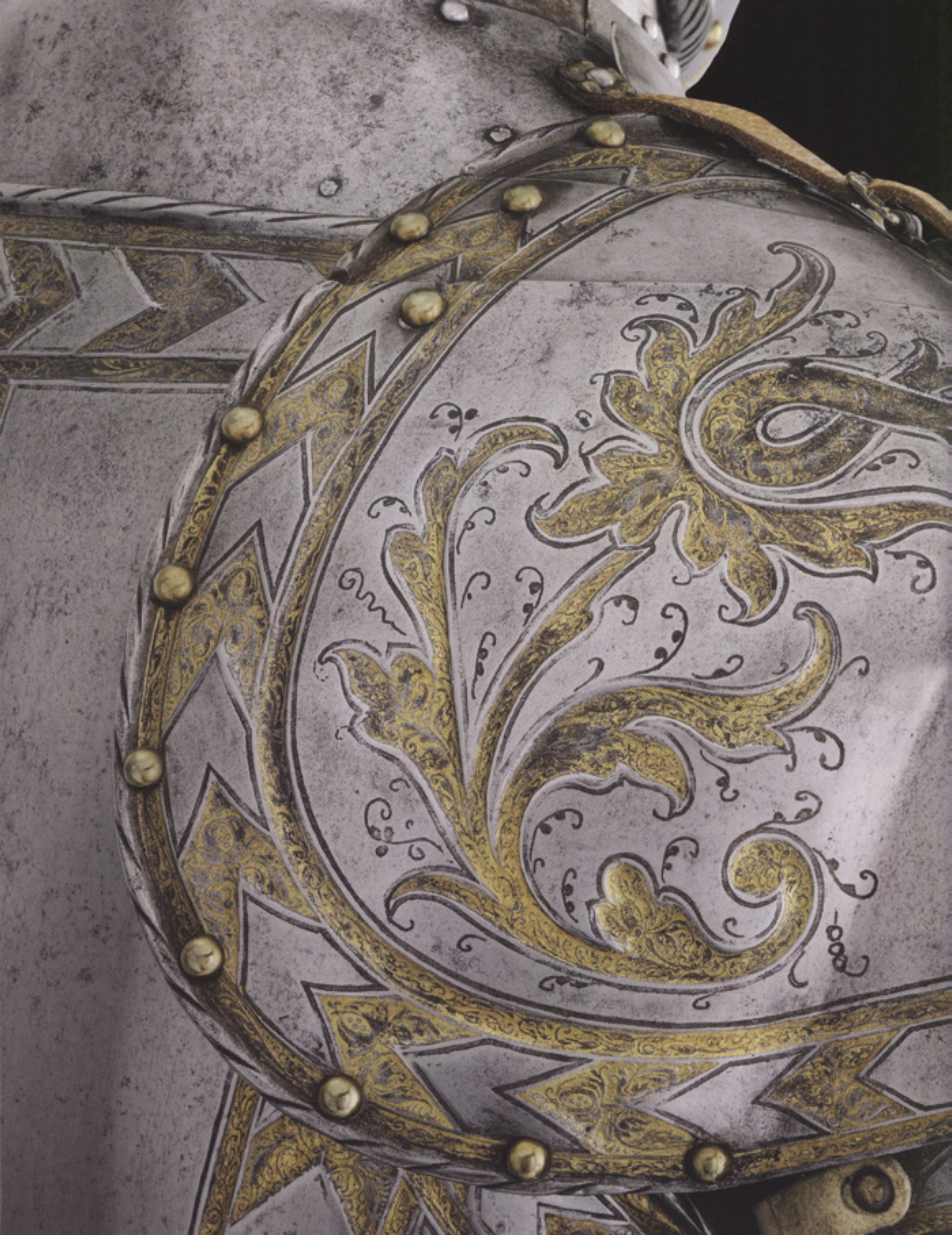
Foot combat in the late 15th century. Whilst jousting was still the most important form of tournament, it was no longer the only military game to be played. (The Art Archive)

The same might be suggested about the fighting manuals of the late 14th and 15th centuries. Whilst they reveal something of the methods used by the masters they are by no means works for self-instruction. The masters were careful to protect the secret techniques at the core of their system; many sections of the manuscripts are unclear or are intentionally obtuse. Lichtenauer, the earliest of the named German masters, swore his pupils to secrecy and wrote down only the most ambiguous rhyming verses, sufficient that his pupils and himself might remember it but useless to anyone who might seek to steal his system. One copy of Talhoffer's manual was bound up alongside discussions of siege engines and the making of fireworks and other matters that appear only slightly related to combat, which again suggests that these were curios rather than working textbooks.

The medieval knight was not, for the most part, a low-brow illiterate thug. As we shall see, many of them were as erudite, literate and eloquent as their brothers and cousins in the Church, but theirs was a practical calling, a physical pursuit and, as such, book learning must have been of secondary importance.

The knight might read Vegetius, he might train at the pell, attend tournament, and be taught by the finest combat masters in Europe, but in the end it was the campaign and the battlefield that called him. Only there could he prove his mettle and fulfil his potential and his vocation.



CHAPTER THREE

CAMPAIGN AND BATTLE

IF THE KNIGHT LEARNT HIS TRADE AT TOURNAMENT HE PERFECTED it on the battlefield. It was his *raison d'être* and the stage upon which he could win his greatest renown. Such grand events were rare, however, and much of the knight's experience of war – the raids, skirmishes and sieges – was far more mundane. However, the risks of defeat – capture, ransom, wounding and death – were no less.

THE RAISING AND STRUCTURE OF ARMIES

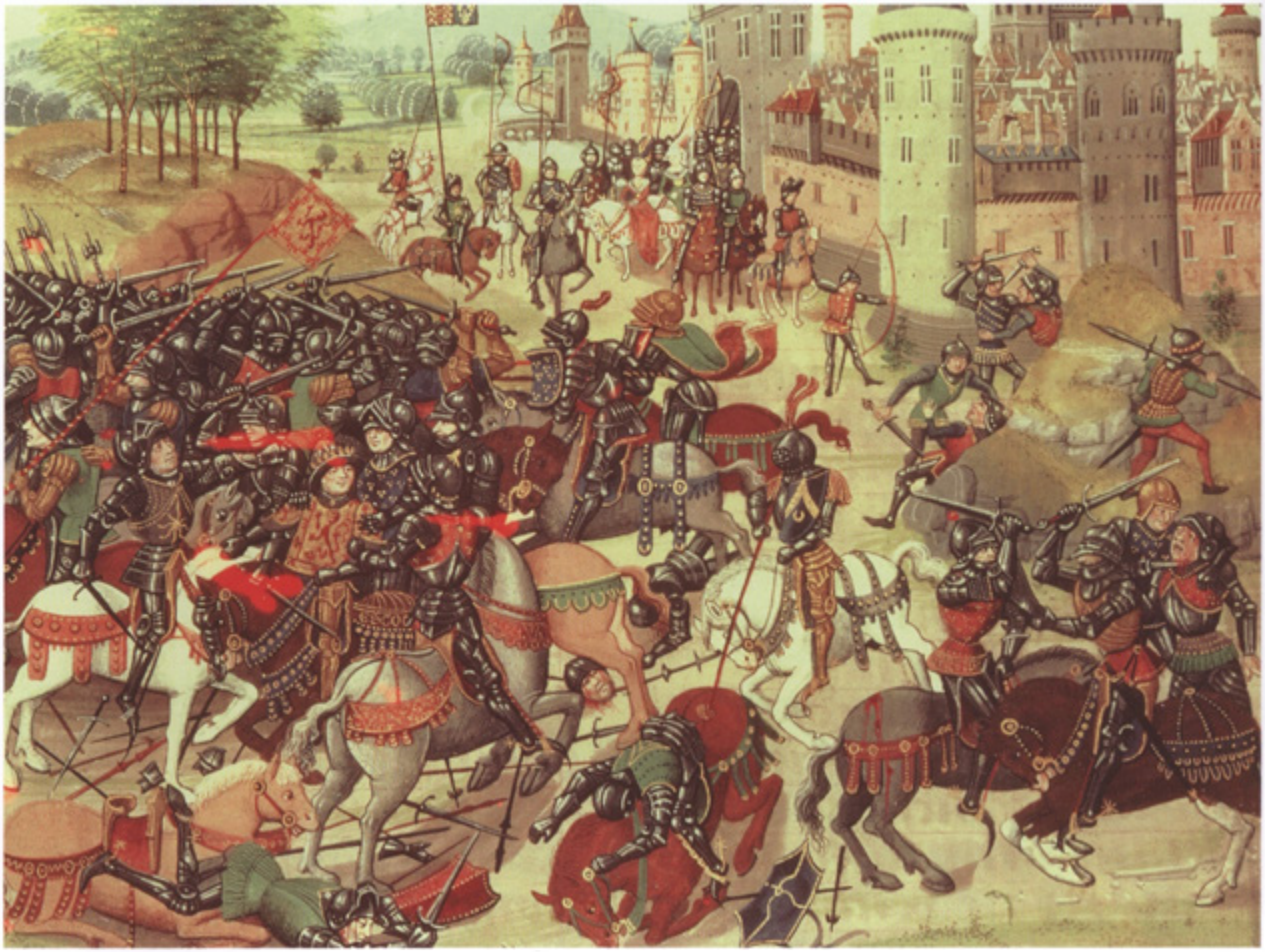
Even though the terms under which a knight might perform military service could vary, from a purely feudal obligation to a wholly monetarized and 'mercenary' one, the process by which the knights came to form an army remained unchanged throughout medieval Europe. When Henry I learnt of Fulk of Anjou's invasion of Normandy in 1117, he marched against him with the members of his royal household, his *familia regis*, and, as Orderic Vitalis tells us, 'dispatching riders he collected the forces of all Normandy for the fight'. Similarly, when the French learned of Henry V's intent to invade in 1415, Charles VI of France issued a *semonce de nobles* in Normandy, Picardy and Brittany, a summons instructing all of the military elite of those regions to prepare to defend against Henry's army and rendezvous in the Norman capital Rouen. At the same time his son, the dauphin, was sent to that city with forces drawn from his own and the king's military households. Henry's own army had been created in much the same way. When he had made the decision to go to war, he informed his nobles and delivered to them indentures agreeing the number of troops that each of the captains would bring to muster at Southampton. In 1455 the Yorkist faction precipitated what would become known as the Wars of the Roses, sending messengers to gather their retainers, adherents and well-wishers to their seats at the castles of Sandal, Middleham and Warwick, from where they marched towards St Albans.

Armies might be raised very quickly indeed. In emergencies small parties of household troops would be inmediately available. The Anglo-Norman *familia regis*, or king's household, routinely fulfilled this role during the unsettled years following the death of the Conqueror, being the only troops who could respond quickly enough to the sudden rebellions and raids common to the French-Norman border region. The raising of French forces in response to Henry V's landing at Harfleur in 1415 took around a month. Although local forces were warned that the English invasion was imminent, towns and castles being instructed to make the necessary preparations, the raising of a royal field army to oppose Henry did take some time. Even after the lords had raised their retinues there was some delay in bringing the army together, primarily because the French commanders were unsure as to Henry's route of march and they waited to be certain of it before deciding on a route to cut him off. Unsurprisingly, Henry's own army took longer to raise, as all of the supplies and logistical support had to be arranged as well. Even so the indentures instructing lords on what retinues they were to bring were signed in late April and the army sailed for the continent in late July. The organization of Edward III's Crécy campaign in 1346 took a similar length of time.

Invariably, the knightly contingents of medieval armies were formed out of the *conrois*, *constabularii* or lances described in the previous chapter, the tactical building blocks that made up the retinues of the noble and royal households. The larger of these would themselves be made up of smaller households, the *familiae* of lesser nobles and bannerets. These retinues were then combined into a number of formations, commonly called 'battles' but in the sources also referred to as *acies* (literally 'wing': a classical Latin organization), or 'divisions' or 'wards'. The norm was for there to be three: the vanguard or fore-ward, main ward and rearguard or rear-ward, the names reflecting their position in the line of march. On the field the vanguard normally formed the right and the rear guard the left of the line. However, since these divisions formed the manoeuvre units of medieval armies, the actual number and ordering of the battles varied according to the strategic and tactical situation.

Similarly, the way in which the retinues were divided up depended upon the nature of the army and of the campaign it intended to pursue. In armies with retinues drawn from different regions or nationalities, then the obvious way was to structure the battles around those identities. At Hastings William's force took the field with the Breton and French knights in battles on either flank, whilst the Normans formed a third division in the centre. In similar fashion, the French army at Courtrai in 1302 was divided into ten divisions based upon the region of France from which they came. The commander of the army, the Count of Artois, drew these together into three battles once they reached the field and he had seen the deployment of the Flemish defenders. Crusading armies, unsurprisingly given their multi-national nature, also formed up like this, forming along regional and national lines with the military orders forming their own divisions. In the Third Crusade each group was identified by crosses of a different colour, red for French, white for English and green for Flemish: a practice that was to spill over into the wars in Europe.

The division of the English army for the Crécy campaign reveals a different structuring. The fore-ward was made up of a few large retinues, that of the young Prince of Wales (who was nominally in command), the experienced earls of

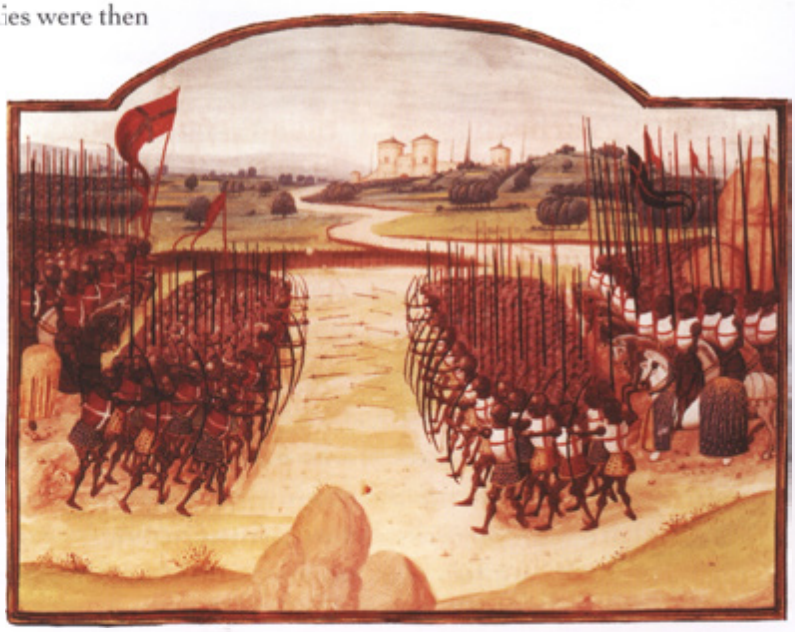


King David of Scotland at battle of Neville's Cross, 1346. Although by no means an accurate depiction of the engagement, it does give a sense of the chaos of battle. (The Art Archive)

Northampton and Warwick who held the rank of constable and marshal respectively, and the prince's tutor Sir Bartholemew Burghesh. The rearguard had a similar make up, of five retinues – those of the Bishop of Durham, the Earl of Arundel, the Earl of Suffolk, the Earl of Huntingdon and the banneret Hugh Despenser. The main guard came under the king's command and was made up of bannerets from the royal household and their retinues along with some foreign contingents and smaller retinues independent of any lord or earl. It seems clear that this decision was based upon a practical reckoning of the size of retinues, which could not be split, and the quality and the experience of the commanders, in particular the men supporting the 16-year-old Black Prince in his first command.

One of the key differences in the armies raised by England after the middle of the 14th century is that archers and men-at-arms were raised as mixed retinues. In other European armies, and in English armies before this period, the former were raised as separate organizations drawn from shire levies or town militia. They formed contingents with their own internal command structures (of 'twenties' and 'hundreds' in England, led by *vintenars* and *centenars*, men who drew a higher rate of pay and were probably leaders within the communities from which the troops came). The mixed retinue, in contrast, saw the indentured lord recruiting both men-at-arms and archers within the same organization. How these mixed retinues took the field continues to be a matter of debate. None of our sources are clear enough to tell us whether the archers were separated out and combined into units in their own right or whether they formed along with the lord and his men-at-arms. The events of the Wars of the Roses would suggest that the latter was the case. How else would lords and their retinues switch sides during battle, as Lord Grey of Ruthin did at the battle of Northampton in 1460, his whole force laying down their arms allowing the Yorkists to march past? Separating out the archers would also require an extra layer of command to be created, with a lord being designated as commander of the archers, or of a part of them. It would make more sense to retain the archers under the leadership of the lord and men-at-arms with whom they were indented rather than have to create a whole new command structure.

The *Ordonannce* armies of 15th-century France and Burgundy were slightly different, but their consistent organization and permanence did not ultimately change the way in which the armies were formed on the field. The *lances fournies* were effectively the equivalent of *conrois* and these were combined into companies under noble captains in the same way that the *conrois* were combined within aristocratic retinues; these companies were then formed up into battles and divisions in a way almost indistinguishable from what are often considered less 'modern' armies. Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, may have conceived of an ideal battle plan for his engagement against the Swiss at Lausanne in 1476, consisting of eight battles in distinct lines, interspersing archers, foot troops and cavalry across the line and within, but the overall structure was still a symmetrical formation consisting of a vanguard, main battle and rearguard, and almost certainly at the point of battle the overly complex structure



Two armies lined up for battle. Although these supposedly represent the battle of Agincourt, the illustrator has in fact drawn a fairly generic image of a 15th-century battle. (The Art Archive) of Charles' plan would have reverted to a much simpler and more manageable one. Indeed when he came to battle at Morat a few days later he formed his army into a more traditional organization of a centre of foot in three lines flanked by archers who were, in turn, flanked on one side by the cavalry and on the other by 150 artillery pieces, a massive battery for its time and the truly novel aspect of his army.

Medieval armies had little in the way of formal rank structure. In the Rule of the Temple are instructions for a number of different officers, each of whom had a role within the Order as a whole. Some of them, like the draper and *infirmarer-brother*, the man in charge of the infirmary, were not military, being instead household and monastic positions. Others were unique to the military orders, in particular the *turcopolier* who was in command of the *turcopoles*, men who fought in an Eastern manner, and, when in battle, the sergeant-brothers, whom he was to form in reserve.

The marshal was the Order's key battlefield officer. He gave almost all military commands, from the setting up of camp to giving the order to charge. It was the marshal that a knight-brother had to approach for permission to exercise his horse whilst on the march or to leave the field if he was injured. The rank of marshal was also present in secular armies. Alongside the constable it is the only position that can be thought of as military rank in the modern sense of the word. Both terms originate in the keeping of horses; marshal or *maréchal* coming from the Frankish *marah schalh*, or 'horse servant' whilst constable is a contraction of the Latin *comites stabularius* or 'count of the stable'. Indeed both terms seem to have continued in use to describe those within a lordly household who had charge of the stables and horses. The title of constable was also routinely applied to one who had command of a castle and garrison, or who had responsibility for levies of foot troops, particularly in rural villages. There also appear to have been marshals within noble *familiae*, performing duties almost identical to those of the marshal of the army.

The duties of the marshal and constable within many of the European armies are not entirely clear, and certainly not as well defined as those of the marshal in the military orders. The ordinances of war, regulations drawn up for the disciplining of armies, and chronicles such as Froissart indicate that orders were routinely given for no man to advance ahead of or fall behind the banners of the constable and marshal, which would suggest that they (and their retinues) might have formed part of the vanguard and rearguard. The ordinances also forbade that anyone should 'depart from their banners' once formed up. Like the secular ordinances the Rule instructed that once in position brothers were not to leave the column without permission. It had more detailed instructions, saying that men joining the column or riding alongside it should do so from downwind so that the dust they threw up would not annoy those in the line. It also specified that a brother should give up the space in front of him but not that behind; presumably the stipulation was to limit the possibility of confusion as the knights and their squires found themselves places within the line of march.

Another key function of the marshal and constable was the organization of shelter for the army, and in particular the assigning of lodgings. The ordinances drawn up by Richard II for his campaign in 1385 state that no one was to take lodging until assigned it by these officers and, once lodged, none were to leave their lodgings, or they were to be arrested by the marshal. The Rule of the Templars explains that each brother should have a tent for himself, his squires and all his equipment, which they were to erect on instruction of the marshal. There is no suggestion that each knight had a specific place within the encampment – just as he found a place in the march column, so each found his own space around the Order's chapel tent. In secular armies the majority of combatants would have sought whatever shelter they could find on the march, the knights and nobles commandeering houses or taking up lodging in monastic houses, already set up to welcome pilgrims.

The great nobility travelled with all of the comforts of home. Amongst the items purchased by the royal household for the Crécy campaign were barber's scissors, ivory combs and a mirror, as well as two foldable thrones and a privy seat covered with cloth, the latter costing 14 shillings and 6 pence (which was over a full week's pay for a knight engaged in the campaign). The knight was not always so fortunate in his lodgings. The Flemish knight Jean le Bel, who took part in the Weardale campaign of 1327, which sought unsuccessfully to bring the Scots to battle, records how they spent four nights in the rain with no wood to build shelters or make camp fires, their armour rusting and their equipment rotting, their only supplies the bread they had carried behind their saddles, which was soaked with their horses' sweat, and some thin wine they had bought from traders who came to the army charging huge prices.

Both the marshal and constable also seem to have had some role in the discipline in the army. As noted above, men who left their billets were to be placed in the custody of the marshal. Many transgressions were punished with loss of horse and harness, which were surrendered to the constable, perhaps to be redeemed at a later point in return for a suitable fine. When Edward III was persuaded to stop the sack of Caen during the Crécy campaign, it was the marshal Godfrey of Harcourt, with his banner borne before him, who rode through the streets enforcing discipline in the king's name.

Unlike the marshal in the Knights Templar or Hospitaller the secular marshal does not appear to have automatically taken overall charge. However John Blount, in his work of 1500 translating a mid-15th-century Latin text on the military arts, writes 'now all things pertain to the constable's office or marshal of the realm or host, but it is by commission for their power is committed to them by the grand captain of the battle'.

BERTRAND DU GUESCLIN

Whilst men like William Marshal might come to the attention of princes on the tournament field, war offered the man-at-arms an even greater opportunity for advancement and gain. The struggle between England and France known to us as the Hundred Years War offered prospects greater than most for those lucky or able enough to grasp them. Bertrand du Guesclin, a squire from an obscure Breton family who was to rise to become France's foremost soldier, was both.

Born around 1320 to a lesser branch of a minor noble family in the remote north-west of Brittany, Bertrand's military career began in the civil war over the succession to the Duchy of Brittany between the English-backed Jean de Montfort and the pro-French Charles of Blois. He made a name for himself as a master of unconventional warfare, his small band of 60 or so guerrillas waging a campaign from deep within the forests of the region. Lacking the funds necessary to attain the rank of a knight he seems to have been little better than bandit. In 1343 he captured the castle of Fougeray whilst most of its garrison was riding to the assistance of the men of Auray. By disguising his men as wood cutters bringing firewood, he was able to get them close enough to seize the gate from the few who remained. The sale of the castle back to the English a few months later, a common feature in a period where garrisons and retinues had to look to themselves for supplies and profit, enabled him to equip his retinue properly and attach them to Pierre de Villiers, one of the French king's captains. Knighted by Arnoul d'Audrehem in the 1350s, Bertrand continued to make use of guerrilla tactics against the English forces in Brittany, his hit-and-run raids on the English siege camp surrounding Rennes ensuring that his name rose in prominence.

In 1364 Bertrand was part of the forces sent against Charles of Navarre, who with the backing of the English was making a play for the Duchy of Burgundy. Before the battle of Cocherel he was elected commander. By dismounting his entire force and then staging a feigned retreat he was able to draw the Anglo-Navarrese from their defensive position on a ridge, avoiding a repeat of the French defeats of the Hundred Years War at Crécy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356, and causing the rout of the entire enemy force.

Betrand was captured at the battle of Auray in October 1363, and by the time his ransom was paid in May 1365, peace had been declared. Fortunately, however, another theatre of war opened up in Castile, and Bertrand was contracted to lead the French mercenary *routiers* in support of Henry of Trastamara against their Anglo-Gascon counterparts, who supported Pedro 'the Cruel' under the English captain Sir Hugh Calverley. At the battle of Nájera, which saw Henry's army defeated, Bertrand was again captured and held by Edward III's son, the Black Prince himself. It was here that Bertrand famously goaded Prince Edward, saying that it was common knowledge that the prince feared Guesclin's reputation so much he would not dare ransom him. Feeling his honour questioned, the Black Prince retorted that for 100,000 *livres* he would be free, a statement he instantly regretted. Bertrand quickly agreed to the amount, which was paid by Charles of France and Henry, his employer.

Henry was ultimately victorious in his campaign and Bertrand was rewarded for his part with substantial lands in the Spanish kingdom. But his career reached its apogee when war between England and France resumed in 1370 and he was made Constable of France; the first time that the honour had

With its snub nose and double chin, it is difficult to believe that this effigy portrays one of France and Europe's most accomplished soldiers. (Getty Images)

been given to a man first and foremost a professional soldier rather than one of the country's high nobility. Bertrand met some resistance to his authority from the aristocracy he was set over, but a series of brisk and purposeful campaigns, characterized by the Constable's energy and careful avoidance of battle unless he had a clear advantage, saw much of the land lost by the French in the preceding decade regained.

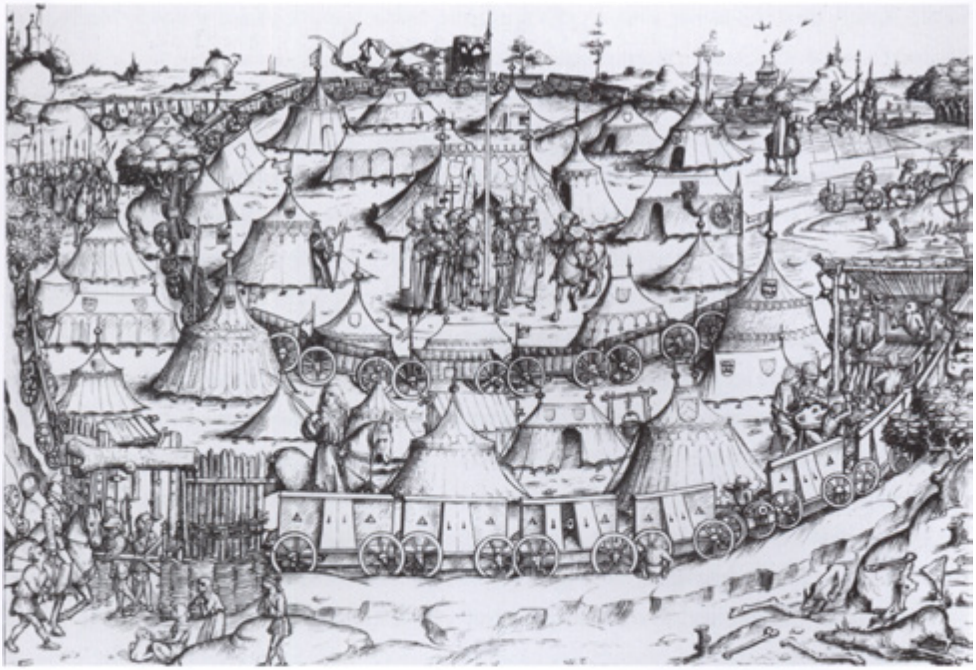
The knight died on campaign, but not in battle. On the last day of the siege of Châteauneuf-de-Randon in 1380, as the garrison were preparing to surrender according to the terms of the Respite agreed, Bertrand died, probably from typhoid. His remains were interred at St Denis alongside the kings and queens of France, but the heart of this coarse-bred Breton squire who had become commander of all France was returned to his Breton homeland.

The distinction between the 'marshal of the realm' and the 'marshal of the host' is an important one. In England the titles of constable and marshal were held by hereditary right. The privilege was jealously guarded. It was the basis for the argument between the earls of Hereford and Gloucester at Bannockburn; the former held the hereditary title of constable of England but Edward II appointed his nephew the Earl of Gloucester as constable of the army, and the men quarrelled over who had the right to lead the vanguard.

In France the ranks of marshal and constable, along with that of the 'master of the king's crossbows', were permanent positions within the royal household. The constable was effectively the king's military lieutenant, with responsibility for the organization of royal armies, supported by the two marshals. The master of the king's crossbows seems to have had authority over all of the foot troops in royal armies, not just the archers. In all cases the men appointed to the positions seem to have been experienced and capable. Charles V gave the office of constable to Bertrand du Guesclin, a Breton-born knight whose military abilities had brought him to the king's attention. That he had difficulties asserting his authority over the greater nobility is indicative of the aristocracy's proprietorial feeling about military command.

Beyond the ranks of marshal and constable, and the French master of the crossbows, there are very few examples of formal ranks, and given the impermanence of medieval armies, this is unsurprising. It would appear that when leadership of specific units or special tasks was required an *ad hoc* appointment was made from amongst the attendant noble and knightly ranks. When the English army formed for battle against the French at Agincourt in 1415, for example, Henry V appointed the 58-year-old Sir Thomas Erpingham (who had been Marshal of England between 1404 and 1405) to command the archers.

Whilst experience and knowledge were key factors in the choice of commanders, social position and political considerations also had a part to play. Even when an army was led by a king or prince of royal blood the greater nobles serving under him felt they had the position and right to be involved in any decision-making. Command could be collegiate, with many of the key martial decisions being made by a council of war. Narrative sources recount the debates that took place in such councils and, although such reported speech should not be taken at face value (chroniclers being fond of writing what men should have said rather than their actual words), they suggest something of how such councils might have run and certainly how contentious they could be. Before Courtrai the great nobles within the French army gathered together to discuss how the battle should be fought. The constable, Raoul de Nesle, warned of the danger of a mounted charge across the streams, and the master of the king's crossbows, Jean de Burlats, argued for an attack by the footsoldiers, a proposition



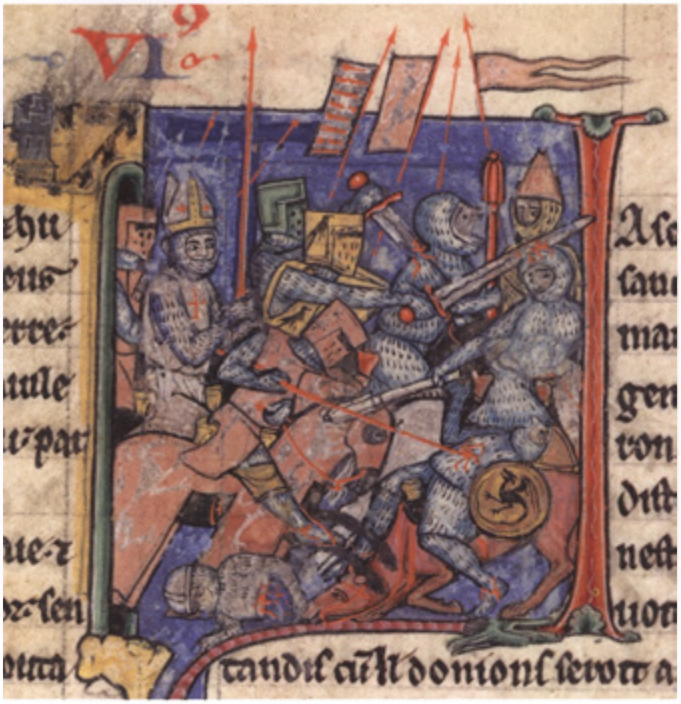
The Imperial army of the Holy Roman Empire encamped, from a 15th-century manuscript. In the centre is the Imperial banner, and the commander's marquee, whilst the camp itself is protected by a *Wagonburg* and artillery. (Bridgeman Art Library)

supported by Geoffrey de Brabant. The majority of the nobles, however, were dismissive of the dangers posed by the militia and suggested that the others' caution might suggest a lack of courage. A similar accusation was levied by Edward II against the Earl of Gloucester, when the latter suggested allowing the army to rest for a day after its rapid march to Bannockburn.

Even in the midst of battle this sort of collective decision was still being made. Joinville's account of the Seventh Crusade is replete with examples of the sort of discussions taking place. At Mansourah in 1250, we see Louis IX calling together his nobles, drawing them off from the thick of the fighting to ask their advice in response to a request for support from the right wing of his army. They agreed, but as he had his army shift position a request came from another quarter begging him to stay in place as one of the battles was pinned in place by the Saracen attacks. The council was called together again and advised the king to hold his position. This led the messenger from the right to return, asking why the king had not moved. For a third time the knights of the council were drawn together and they changed their mind and advice yet again. Earlier in the same battle the three leaders of Louis' vanguard, the Count of Anjou, the Master of the Temple and the English Earl of Salisbury, having initially routed the Muslim forces then debated whether to pursue. The Earl of Salisbury argued for caution whilst the Templars demanded that they be allowed to take the first position, as had been agreed with the king. The Count of Artois would not listen, in no small part because one of his knights, who was deaf as a post, hauled on his lord's reins shouting 'After them! After them!'

All of this suggests that medieval command was a chaotic affair, driven by the egos of noblemen whose social status rather than ability or experience determined their influence. There is an element of truth to this. The nobility's sense of its right to engage in private war remained strong into the Renaissance. Even in England where strong royal government kept this in check, it reappeared very quickly when royal authority was lacking such as during the so-called 'anarchy' of Stephen's reign or the Wars of the Roses that were as much about the settling of personal scores as they were about who had the greater right to rule. On the continent, where central authority was almost always weaker, private warfare was a commonplace event. This explains why during the First Crusade the commanders constantly squabbled over who was in overall command, only being kept in check by the influence of the Pope's representative the legate Adhemar of Le Puy, and why some felt able to abandon the main drive on Jerusalem and set out on their own part, as Baldwin of Boulogne and Bohemond of Taranto were to do, forming the County of Edessa and Principality of Antioch respectively.

Invariably ultimate command devolved upon one individual, whether the king or prince, an appointed captain or the most senior noble. A strong and charismatic commander was needed to keep the nobles' and knights' independent and quarrelsome tendencies in check. A weaker commander could easily see his force fall apart as the egos and the demands of the chivalric ethic asserted themselves, as happened to Edward II at Bannockburn. As Bertrand du Guesclin found, a lack of breeding might also pose problems for a commander. This seems to have been the case with the ill-fated campaign led by Sir Robert Knollys in 1370. Knollys had risen through the ranks, first serving as an archer. His *chevauchée*, or raid, into northern France was beset by problems, including disputes with the commanders of retinues, and the force disbanded, with men going off on their own, until eventually the whole campaign fell apart. Whilst Knollys was able to defend himself against the accusations that dogged his failure, it was considered significant that his was the only major English campaign not to be led by a man of noble descent.



Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy, the Pope's representative on the First Crusade. He is depicted here in armour but with the mitre of a bishop and carrying the Holy Lance miraculously discovered at Antioch. (© British Library)

THE ARMY ON THE MARCH

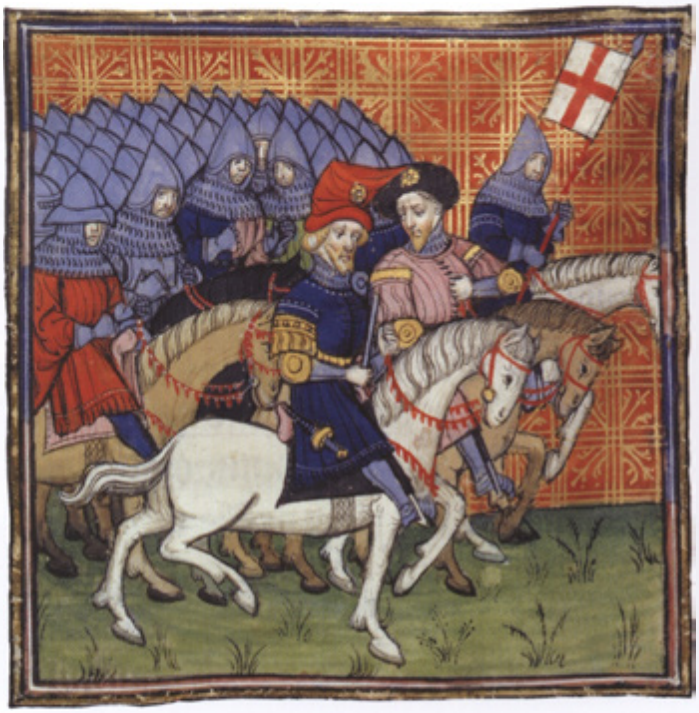
Many of the instructions within the surviving ordinances are concerned with the discipline and organization of the army as it campaigned. As we have seen they stipulated that no one should march in advance of the banners of the constable and marshal, nor leave the line of march without permission.

Keeping an army together on the march was vital. Desertion was a common fear: less so when armies were operating far from home or amongst the knights and men-at-arms, but even in the Holy Land men were able to drift away from the army to return home, whilst injunctions like that given for the Agincourt campaign instructing all members of the army to wear a red cross as an identifying badge, and the regular taking of musters, applied to not just the shire levies and town militias but to all including the men-at-arms and knights.

In the immediate vicinity of the enemy, or with the expectation of battle, it was vital that a commander keep his army concentrated and in good order. As we have seen medieval armies were small. As such if they dispersed on the march the individual elements could be relatively easy to pick off. Their small size also meant that they were often difficult to find. The threat of being ambushed or blundering into the enemy encouraged a cautious commander to keep his forces together so that the army might more easily be deployed for battle. For that reason the order of march was often identical to the order of battle.

A wise commander would dispatch some of his troops to reconnoitre the line of march, reporting on the strength of garrisons and the defences of towns along the route of march. In both the Crécy and Agincourt campaigns scouts were sent to locate crossing points on the Somme. Locating the enemy army and judging his strength was also a priority. Whilst these tasks might be assigned to non-knightly *speculatores*, men like the hobelar Robert le Brut, paid to 'spy out the passings and haunts of the enemy', knights themselves were no less capable.

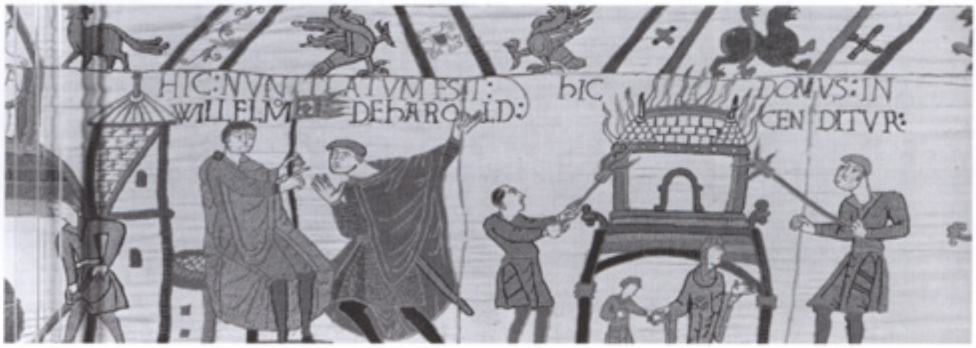
We have already read about William Marshal spying on the French army in 1189. In 1066, after landing at Pevensey at the start of the Hastings campaign, 'William [the Conqueror] was quick to investigate the region and its



An English army on the march, mid-14th century. The men-at-arms ride behind the banner of St George and two commanders, one of whom carries a 'wand' of command. (© British Library) inhabitants with a company of no more than twenty-five knights'. During the siege of Alençon, in William the Conqueror's war against Count Geoffrey Martel of Anjou in 1047, no less a man than William Fitz Osbern, lord of Breteuil and the hereditary steward of Normandy, was sent ahead of the army on reconnaissance. Individual lords and their retinues might be moved out to the flanks to offer them protection. The Earl of Warwick and Sir Ralph Chobham and their retinues worked the flanks of the main army on the Crécy campaign, shielding it by watching the towns off the route of march for signs that their garrisons might sortie out. By the time they reached the Somme and turned to seek a crossing point, troops from the French army shadowed their movements whilst the main force gathered itself ahead of them, trying to force a confrontation.

Strategic aims might see an army dispersed to some extent. Records of the Crécy campaign show after landing in France the English army did not march in a single column but ranged through Normandy and Picardy in a swathe about a mile wide. Edward was secure in the knowledge that a French army had not had time to gather and that the local garrisons were too weak to be in a position to challenge him. Despite his early edicts against the plundering of the Norman villages, by the time he reached the region of the Île-de-France the English army was sacking and burning along the whole line of march. This act served the aims of the campaign. It seems certain that Edward was seeking to bring the French king Philippe to battle. The ravaging of land under his lordship struck at the heart of medieval kingship: subjects gave their loyalty and in return their lord defended them and their interests. That the English could plunder and burn at will suggested that the French monarchy was weak, increased the chances of rebellion, and forced Philippe to act. William the Conqueror seems to have used a similar ploy on the Hastings campaign. Rather than march directly on London he spent time in and around Harold Godwinson's lands close to Hastings, presumably to draw the English king into an engagement.

Such ravaging could also be an end in itself. Raids into an enemy's territory have been a regular element of warfare since time began. Being a low-intensity conflict –



Normans burning an English house. This may be a reference to William's ravaging of Harold's estates in the south of England after his landing at Pevensey. (Bridgeman Art Library) with limited objectives, if any, beyond gathering in plunder, causing damage and destruction, and minimizing outlay on the part of the raiders – they are a form of warfare which suits a society like that of medieval Europe. Its weak central authority, with a collection of strong and independent lordships, encouraged such internecine, small-scale activity. The 14th-century *chévauchée* (the word literally means 'a ride') was, in effect, a larger and centrally run version of this operation, although it arguably had a broader strategic aim of keeping the pressure on the French king. Such ravaging might also serve as a means of punishing rebellion. After the revolt of 1069 in the north of England, which saw the murder of Robert of Comines, Earl of Northumbria, and a Scottish-supported rebel army capturing York, William the Conqueror launched a punitive campaign that famously cut a swathe through the northern counties. Symeon of Durham writes that:

> ... so great a famine prevailed that men, compelled by hunger, devoured human flesh, that of horses, dogs, and cats, and whatever custom abhors; others sold themselves to perpetual slavery, so that they might in any way preserve their wretched existence; others, while about to go into exile from their country, fell down in the middle of their journey and gave up the ghost. It was horrific to behold human corpses decaying in the houses, the streets, and the roads, swarming with worms, while they were consuming in corruption with an abominable stench. For no one was left to bury them in the earth, all being cut off either by the sword or by famine. Meanwhile, the land being thus deprived of any one to cultivate it for nine years, an extensive solitude prevailed all around. There was no village inhabited between York and Durham; they became lurking places to wild beasts and robbers, and were a great dread to travellers.

Whilst the campaign was clearly harsh, current scholarship suggests that the long-term costs of the 'harrying of the north' were nowhere near as great as were traditionally thought. Ravaging might cause short-term hardship but a single *chévauchée* was unlikely to cause serious economic damage. It was the crossing and re-crossing of the same territory by the French and English armies, not to mention the bands of *routiers*, unemployed soldiers seeking to maintain themselves in the peace between the campaigns of the Hundred Years War, that saw large areas of France wasted and impoverished.

Similarly the plundering of farms and villages was unlikely to make any man rich, but the levying of *patis*, protection money demanded from the towns along the *chévauchée*'s line of march, could prove very lucrative and, just as with the ransoming of prisoners (of which more below), the ordinances had clear rules on the division of the spoils. Knights and men-at-arms were no less likely to break these rules than the

COURTRAI: THE BATTLE OF THE GOLDEN SPURS

On 11 July 1302, outside of the Flemish city of Courtrai, an army of weavers, dyers, fishermen and carpenters defeated the finest knightly army in Western Europe.

It was Philippe the Fair's arrest of his vassal Guy de Dampierre, Count of Flanders, and the poor leadership of his governor Count Jacques of St Pol, that sparked the revolt known as the Bruges Matins where the commoners massacred 120 French soldiers. Philippe sent an army to punish the rebels whilst the count's son and grandson, Guy de Namur and Willem van Jülich, gathered their own forces. The two armies came together outside the strategically important town and castle of Courtrai.

Both armies were about the same size, roughly 9,000 strong, but were very different in composition. The Flemish force was almost entirely comprised of footsoldiers drawn from the town militias. Lightly armoured – a steel cap or *chapeau de fer*, a padded gambeson, maybe a mail shirt and arm and leg defences for the wealthiest – they carried either pikes (long spears of about 12 feet rather than the 16-foot weapon of the 16th and 17th centuries) or the typical *goedendag* (also referred to as the *gepinde staf*), a stout club bound at its head with an iron band and a steel pin projecting from the end. Some 900 crossbowmen protected by *pavisiers*, men carrying large shields, formed a separate, elite company.

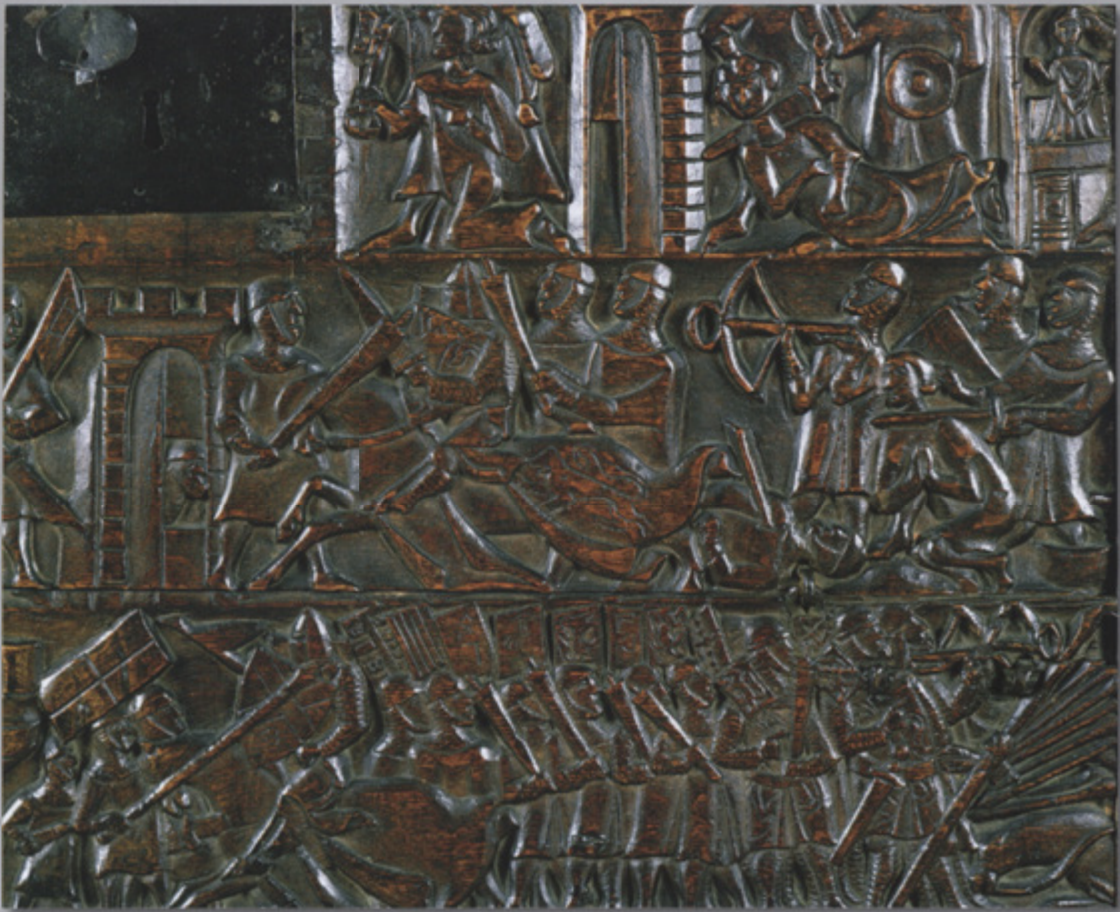
The French army, under Count Robert of Artois, had about 5,000 to 6,000 thousand footsoldiers, about a third of whom were crossbowmen and *bidauts*, skirmishers armed with javelins and slingshots; they were the only French footsoldiers to take part in the battle. The rest, some 3,000, were the knights and squires, all fully armoured and on caparisoned warhorses. Professional warriors, widely and rightly regarded as the finest in Europe, they had a qualitative superiority over the amateur force of artisans, tradesmen and peasants.

The Flemish forces deployed themselves well, on level ground to the east with one flank protected by the marshy bank of the river Lys, the other resting on the town wall. In front of the deep formations of heavy infantry and lined by the corps of crossbowmen were two streams, the Groeninge Bek and the Grote Bek. The French formed opposite them, initiating their attack with their crossbows and the *bidauts*. Their superior numbers drove the Flemings back from the stream's edge, giving space for the French knights to cross and reorganize for the charge.

The two main battles charged simultaneously, 3,000 horsemen bearing down on the militia's line. Such a charge usually drove all before it, smashing the opposition's cohesion, breaking their morale and putting them to flight.

The Flemish militias held. Their camaraderie and *esprit de corps*, as they stood shoulder to shoulder with workmates and family in their livery and beneath the emblems of their guilds, kept them in place whilst the forest of pikes blunted the knights' charge. The charge could not be completely stopped however, and the knights fought their way into the Flemish ranks. As they did so the Flemish numbers began to tell, surrounding the knights and negating their advantage in height and skill.

The French were steadily forced back into the streams they had crossed and some knights drowned. The French reserve attempted to engage but had not space to launch an effective charge, were held, broke



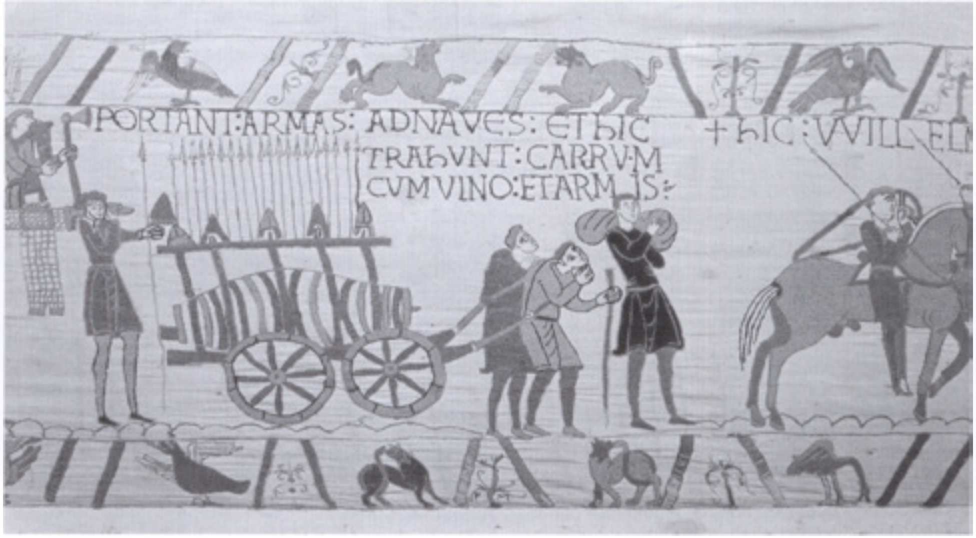
Images of the battle of Courtrai from the contemporary Courtrai chest, an oak chest displaying Flemish carvings and discovered in Oxford, England in 1909. The bottom register of the image shows the Flemish militiamen, including troops with pikes. (Bridgeman Art Library)

and fled. Soon the whole French army was in flight, pursued by the Flemings for up to 6 miles. Some 1,200 nobles and knights, the cream of French chivalry, lost their lives and 500 gilded spurs, symbols of their knighthood, were collected and displayed as trophies in the church of Our Lady of Courtrai.

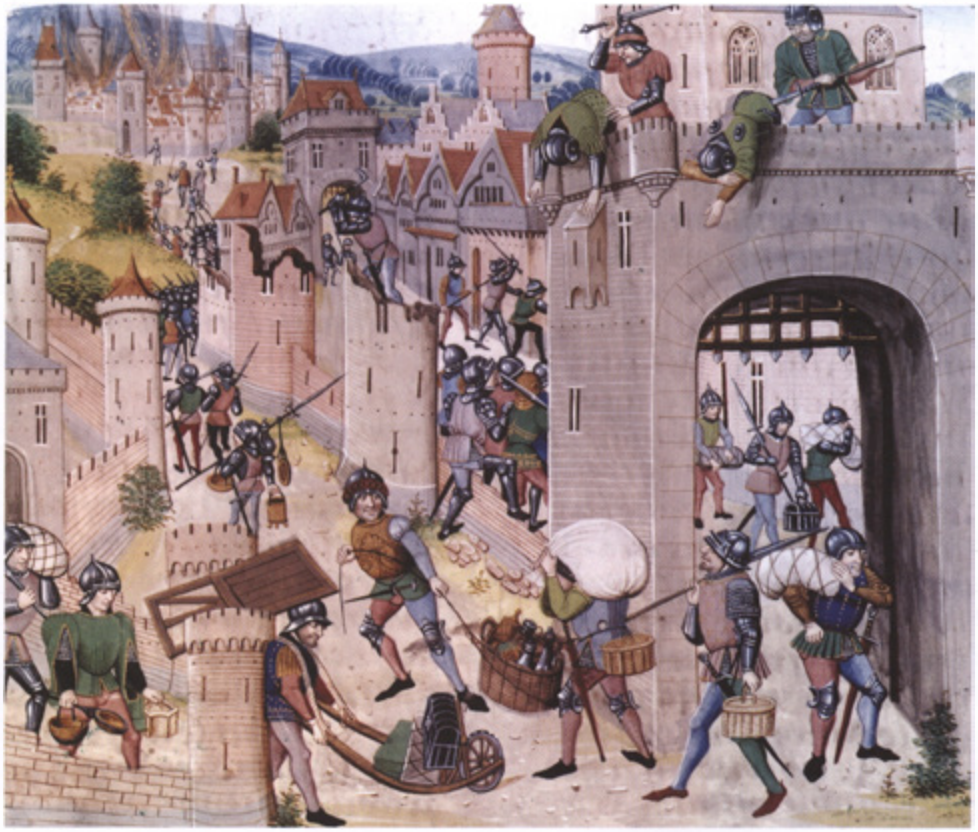
The defeat at Courtrai cut the heart out of the French nobility and shook its self-confidence. It also showed that infantry, so long as it stood firm, could defeat heavy cavalry. When the Scots pikemen did the same thing to the English at Bannockburn in 1314 the chronicler Thomas Gray compared it with the Flemish victory.

common foot troops. Chronicling the actions of the Fourth Crusade, which ended with the sack of Constantinople, Geoffrey de Villehardouin records how the Count of St Pol hanged one of his own knights, with his shield hung round his neck as a display of his shame, for keeping back booty that should have been shared out.

The plundering of an enemy's territory was also a legitimate means of supplementing an army's supplies of food and drink and fodder for its horses. It was an inefficient way of supplying all of an army's needs, however, and a substantial amount of effort went into provisioning the army. Before a campaign set out, food and drink would be gathered into stockpiles. The fortress town of Berwick-upon-Tweed was a key stockpile for the Edwardian campaigns against the Scots, whilst Southampton performed a similar function for cross-Channel expeditions. In order to collect provisions together, royal officers might be instructed to gather food from within their territory and forward it to the army; or edicts might be passed, like the one Edward I issued in 1282, closing down the markets in the Welsh Marches and forcing merchants to bring their goods to Chester, which was established as the supply base for his army heading against the Welsh princes. Similarly, in enemy territory announcements might be made encouraging local suppliers to bring their goods straight to the army where markets would be set up with fixed prices considered fair to both supplier and soldier. Lords might bring their own supplies for their retinues, using the systems already in place for the provisioning of their own itinerant courts for military movement. The royal household accounts of Edward III give some indication of the huge quantities of food that were shipped across during the Crécy campaign. Apart from thousands of tons of peas, beans, oats and barley, and nearly 50,000 gallons



The supplies for the Norman army being gathered prior to the invasion of England. Arms, armour, food and wine all had to be taken across the Channel, no small undertaking. (Bridgeman Art Library)



A town is sacked during the Hundred Years War. The economic devastation wrought by the English *chévauchées* and the *écorcheurs* or 'flayers' – bands of unemployed soldiers – was intense, though localized to the northern and south-western regions of France. (The Art Archive)

of wine, dozens of herds of live cattle, sheep and pigs and crates of chickens, geese, even heron and partridges were all shipped across to be used by the royal kitchen. All of this had to be transported – loaded onto wagons and carts, some of which would have been commissioned and built for the campaign but many of which would have been pressed into service from estates and merchants.

Similarly ships would be hired, along with the masters and crew. The English armies of Edward I that marched into Wales and Scotland in the campaigns of 1282/83 and 1296 respectively were generally shadowed by fleets carrying provisions, just as Richard's crusading column were followed on their march to Jaffa in 1192.

Despite these preparations food would invariably run short, or soldiers would seek to augment their rations and their pay. Such ravaging and plundering was of course wholly inappropriate in one's own lands or in lands one made claims on. Like Edward III, who hanged 20 men for the looting and burning of the monastery of St Lucien at Beauvais, Henry V laid out the stiffest of penalties for those who resorted to theft or looting during the Agincourt campaign. Edward had seen fit to allow the sack of Philippe of France's personal lands in the Île-de-France as a challenge to his rival. By contrast, Henry, who shared Edward's belief in the English king's right to the French crown, saw all of the lands his army marched through as his own and the people (so long as they did not oppose him) as his subjects and therefore under his protection. Many of the pleas for royal justice made after military campaigns are concerned with soldiers stealing and causing disturbances whilst getting to the muster point and waiting for the army to set off into enemy territory. To try to minimize these depredations the arrangements for raising troops often entailed the paying of wages in advance or the provision of money for them to buy food and pay for lodgings on their way to the muster point.

The way in which a medieval army could strip the resources of an area meant that it rarely stayed in one place for long. Denuding their immediate area, troops were forced to range ever further afield, and the foraging parties becoming increasingly vulnerable to attack from outlying garrisons or a relieving force. Being encamped in one location for any duration also posed other problems. Disease was an inevitable corollary of a long-standing encampment. So-called 'camp fever' – typhoid and cholera caused by infected water – could quickly decimate an army, whilst a shortage of supplies could lead to starvation and other diseases. Louis IX's army suffered both from dysentery and scurvy, with the king having his leggings cut away because of the former and men having their infected gums cut away because of the latter. When Henry V's army invested Harfleur in 1415 it quickly began to suffer from dysentery. The siege lines were drawn up on marshland which meant that waste and dead bodies could not be properly buried and the drinking water became contaminated. More men died or were invalided home as a result of sickness than were killed in the siege itself.

THE SIEGE

It is something of a truism that sieges were far more common than pitched battles and that it was the siege and not the battle that typified warfare in the middle ages. Operations centred on fortified locations were indeed a mainstay of medieval strategy, but that did not invariably mean that every such location had to be invested. In military terms fortifications were locations from which a garrison could project its military power into the surrounding area. During a campaign it was often sufficient to neutralize the garrison by penning it up until the army had passed by. Without the support of a field army there was only a limited amount that a garrison could do against a major enemy force. Spoiling raids might be launched against foragers or supply lines, but the former were usually sizeable enough to take care of themselves and rarely drifted too far from the protection of the main force, whilst medieval armies, as we have seen, were self contained, with little in the way of a logistical tail that could be attacked, particularly in the fast-moving *chévauchée*. The Agincourt campaign is a prime example of this. Apart from the siege and capture of Harfleur, which served to provide the English with a second port on the French coast, Henry V had no need to invest any of the other towns along his route. Instead he wove his way, avoiding the towns with larger garrisons and guns and intimidating or negotiating with the smaller ones, who for the most part remained behind their walls. Besieging and holding every town and castle along the way was neither desirable nor practical. Each siege would have lengthened the campaign, stretching the army's resources and reducing its strength since each captured location would then require a garrison taken from the field army.

Some towns and fortifications simply could not be ignored, however; either because of their strategic position or political significance they had to be reduced. Even this did not mean that an assault was inevitable. The ability to calculate the staying power of a garrison meant that it was possible for the commanders of both sides to negotiate a date for surrender, something called 'conditional respite'. A date was calculated based upon the length of time the besieged could reasonably hope to hold out and in which a relief army might reasonably be expected to arrive. A truce would be called and the besieged were allowed to send a messenger to their overlord asking for relief. The attacking force need not even stay in place around the fortification, but could continue its march, reasonably confident that the terms of the agreement would be honoured. The negotiations between Robert the Bruce of Scotland and Philip Mowbray, the captain of English-held Stirling Castle, for its surrender if not relieved by midsummer 1314 led Edward II to launch the ill-fated expedition that ended in defeat at Bannockburn.

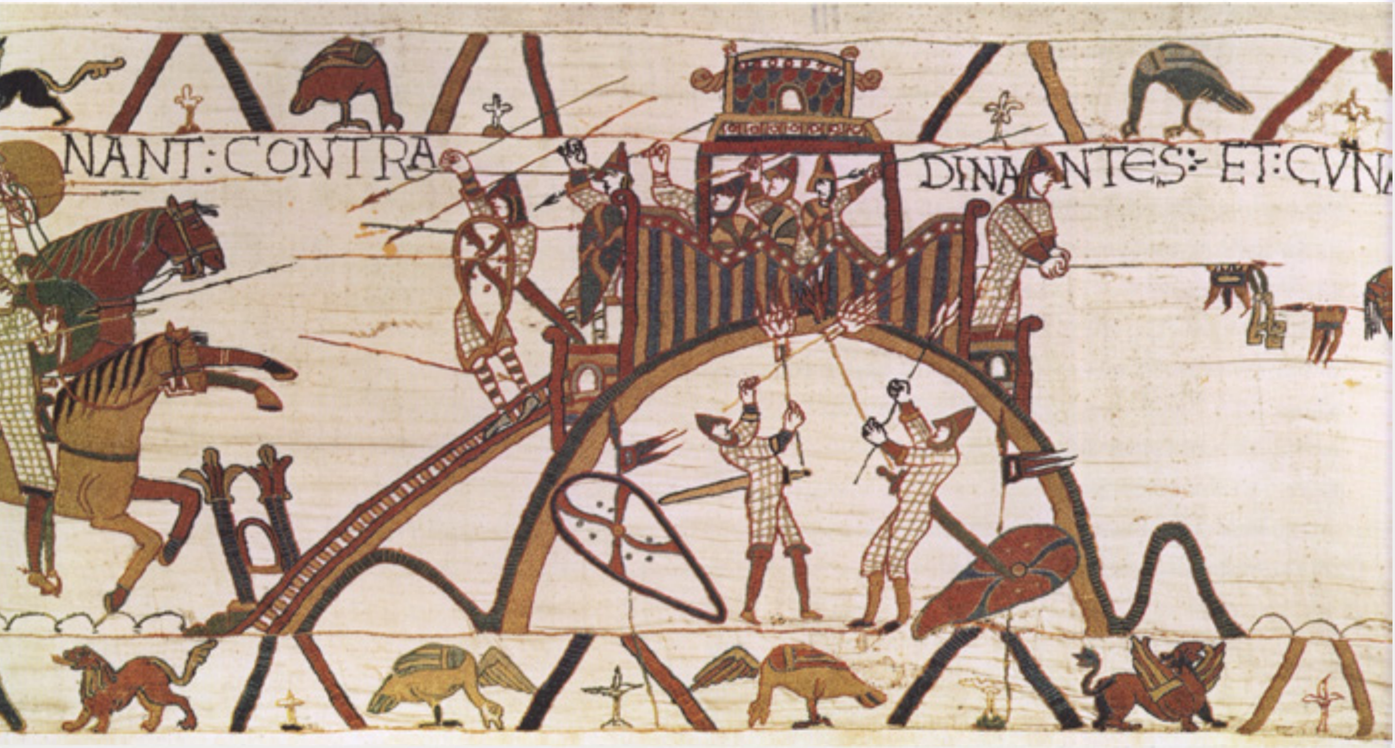
The desirability of gaining the surrender of a fortress without the dangers of an assault is why two of the most important operations in a siege had little to do with combat. If a fortification could be taken by trick, treachery or threat then the loss of life and the dangers of failure were minimized or even negated.

In some cases it might prove possible to get a member of the garrison to betray the castle, although this was more a matter of luck than judgement. When the crusading army besieged Antioch in 1098 they only succeeded in capturing the city because one of the tower captains, an Armenian named Firouz, was disgruntled at the garrison commander Yaghi-Siyan. He sent a message to Bohemond of Taranto agreeing to open a window and lower a rope to allow some crusaders in so that they could open the gates for the rest. Sometimes trickery could be used. During the civil war for the control of the Duchy of Brittany in 1341 the knight Henry de Spinefort was captured by Jean de Montfort when the town of Rennes was seized. Spinefort's brother was holding the nearby town of Hennebont for the Duke of Brittany, and, attempting to prevent his brother's death, Spinefort asked Jean de Montfort to allow him to march ahead of the main army with 200 men, bearing the banner of the Duchy of Brittany. Seeing this banner and recognizing his brother, the governor of Hennebont opened the gates which Spinefort seized and turned over to de Montfort. Ranulph, Earl of Chester, seized the castle at Lincoln in 1141 by similarly underhand means. Orderic Vitalis tells us that Ranulph and his half-brother arranged for their wives to visit the wife of the garrison commander. After a while Ranulph and three knights arrived, ostensibly to collect the ladies. On being admitted through the gates they seized them and let in more troops and ejected the garrison. Robert Fitz Hildebrand took Portchester Castle in 1142–43 by seducing the wife of the castellan, and then imprisoning her husband.

The attacker might try to scare the garrison into submission. Henry I got the Bridgnorth garrison to surrender by threatening to hang them. King Stephen tried a similar tactic against John Marshal at Newbury in 1152. Holding John's son, the famous William, as a hostage, Stephen threatened to hang the child unless John surrendered. John refused the gambit claiming he had the 'anvil and hammers to produce even finer ones'. Being a kind-hearted fellow, however, Stephen could not kill William. At Montereau in 1420 Henry V hanged a number of hostages in an attempt to force its surrender but the act failed to move the garrison.

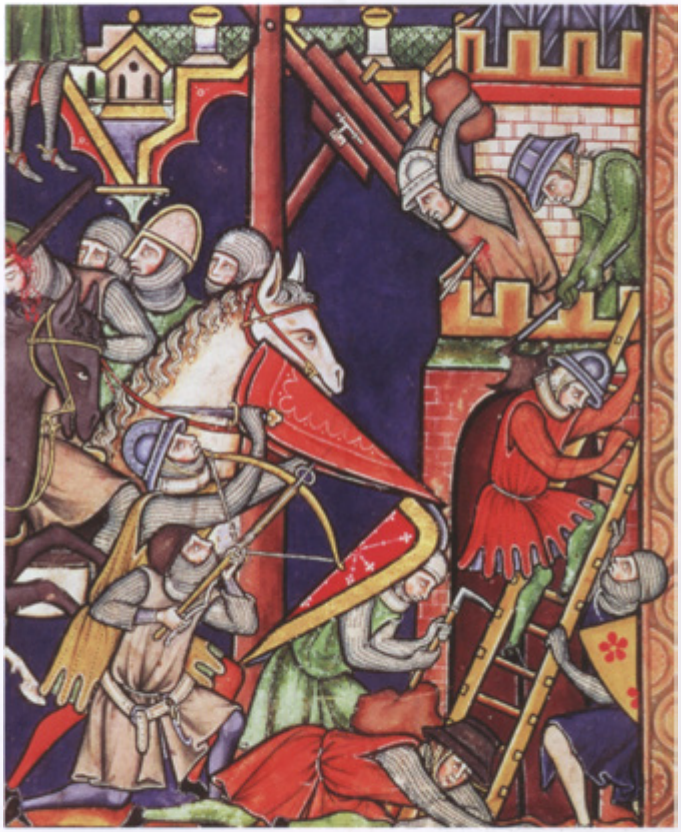
If cunning and intimidation failed then the besieger had to fall back on more robust methods. He could try starving the opposition out but the constraints of time rarely

The burning of Dinan, during William's campaign against Conan of Brittany. The wooden motte and bailey castle was prone to fire, although wet animal hides might be thrown over the walls to try and protect them. (Bridgeman Art Library)



made this a practical proposition. The provisions of the attackers would be rapidly depleted or a relief army might arrive and drive them off. Edward III's siege of Caen, which followed his victory at Crécy and lasted almost a year, was very unusual, but this was in part because the town lay on the Channel coast, which allowed the king to re-supply the army and bring in fresh troops. Even so, the cost almost bankrupted the Crown.

Once the decision had been made to take the castle by main force then a number of options presented themselves. In the 11th and 12th centuries when the majority of castle defences were made of timber, the simplest option was to burn the castle down around the defenders' ears. We see this in the Bayeux Tapestry's depiction of the 1058 Norman siege of Dinan. Defenders could counter this by throwing water over the defences or by covering them in wet hides. Developments in stone fortification reduced the risks of fire but they were still flammable enough to be reduced if the besiegers got lucky.



A town under siege in the mid-13th century. Crossbowmen try to keep the defenders from the walls while men both undermine the walls with picks and scale them with ladders. In the meantime the defenders use whatever they can to repel the assaults. (Bridgeman Art Library)

To scale the walls of a fortress was a dangerous proposition. The simplest method was to use scaling ladders. The Scots were firm believers in the use of these, employing rope ladders with metal hooks to grasp the walls, wooden rungs and fenders to keep them away from the walls. The ladder was raised up using a long pike. Robert the Bruce used scaling ladders to capture Perth in 1312, and tried at Berwick the same year, although here a dog alerted the garrison to the night attack.

The belfry, or siege tower, had a long pedigree having been used by the Romans, and indeed by the Assyrians in the seventh century BC. Siege towers were built by the First Crusaders at Jerusalem and used to scale the walls. Edward I used a mobile belfry against the Scots at Bothwell Castle in 1301, having it brought up in prefabricated pieces from Glasgow on 30 carts. Other belfries seem to have been static, serving only to give archers a view over the enemy walls so that they could fire down into the courtyards. Such belfries were built by Louis IX's army at Mansourah to try to protect the dyke that was being constructed to span the Nile.

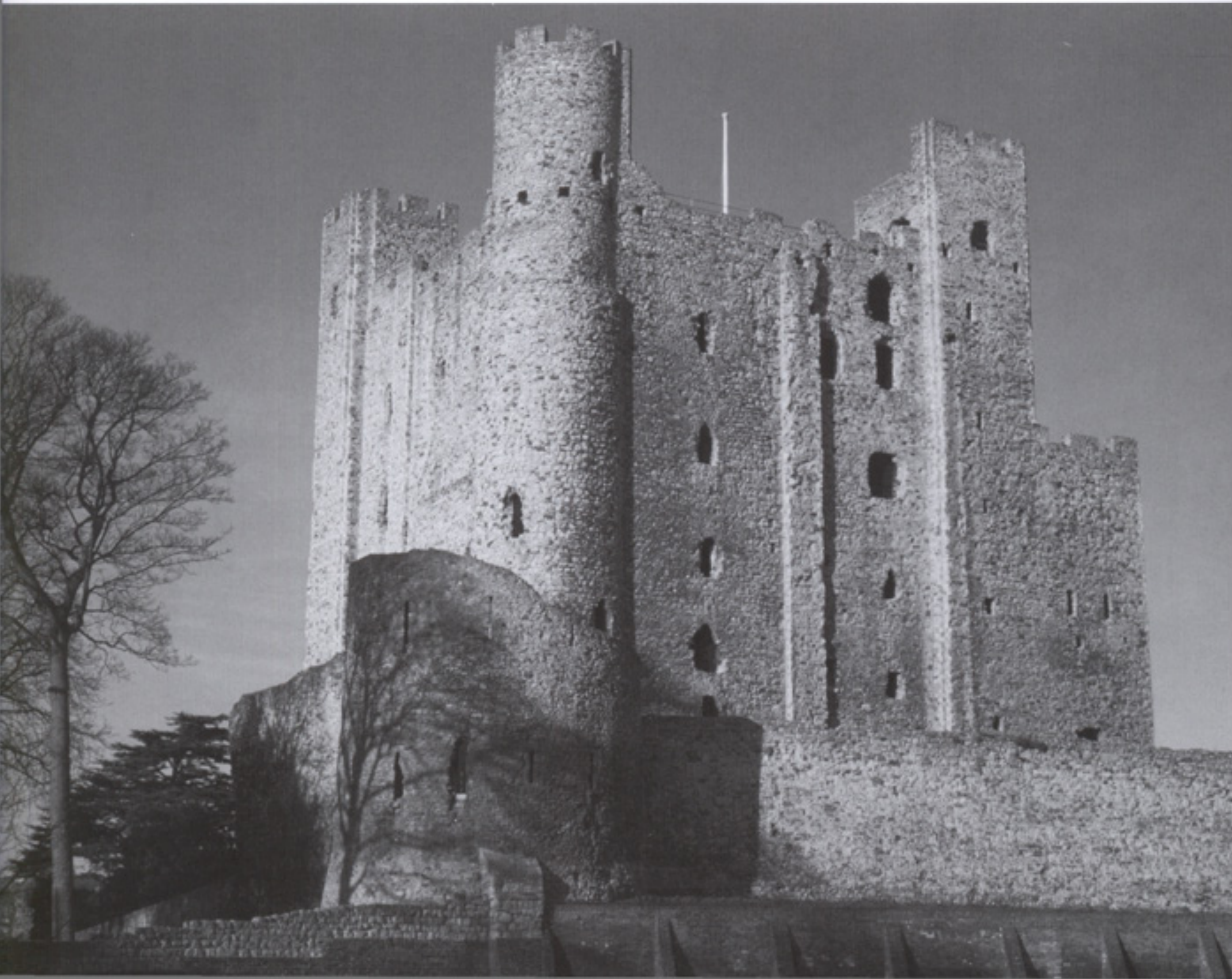
If it proved impossible to go over the walls then one might choose to go under them. Mines were sunk underneath the fortifications and then the supporting pits burnt causing the wall section to collapse. This was specialist work. English miners seem to have been regularly recruited from the Forest of Dean where there were extensive iron mines. A total of 30 were used at Bedford in 1224 during Henry III's attempt to defeat the rebel Falkes de Breaute, where they were so successful that their leader, John of Standon, was rewarded with 12 acres of land. At King John's siege of rebel-held Rochester in 1215 miners were used to collapse a section of the bailey wall and then the south-east tower of the keep. Here John ordered 40 hog carcasses to be added to the fire; the heat from these fatty masses helped to bring down the tower and the defenders were forced to close themselves off in the further half of the keep, using a dividing wall to keep out the attackers. The defenders of a castle might be able to detect the miners at work, using bottles of water to mark the tremors from the underground digging. Then counter-mines might be sunk which could either be flooded, destroying both mines, or allow troops to enter the enemy mine, during which fierce underground battles could ensue.

Apart from going under or over, one could go through. This could be done with picks, the troops protected by hide-covered canopies called cats or sows, or by the use of siege artillery. In the 11th century such *perriers*, or stone-throwers, tended to be man-powered, with a dozen or more men hauling on ropes on one end of a beam, with a sling on the other.

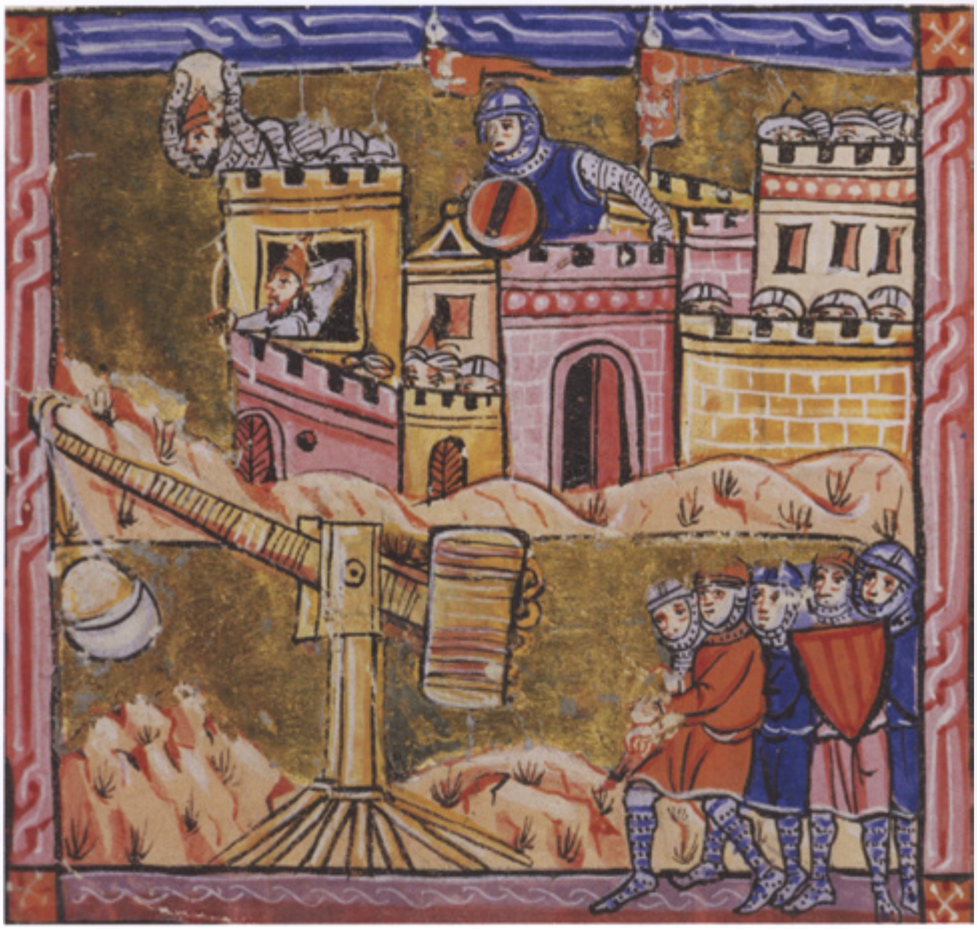
Occasionally torsion engines called *mangonels* were used. These were ancient machines developed by the Greeks and Romans and used twisted rope or catgut to produce tension which when released powered the throwing arm.

In the early 13th century there was a major development in the form of the *trebuchet*, a counterweight machine. Here the men hauling on the rope were replaced by a large bucket holding ballast. They could be huge in size. Modern reconstructions suggest that a range of 200 yards with a projectile weighing 33 pounds was well within their abilities. Such engines were not built in situ but sent for and delivered in pre-packed form. Edward I built perhaps the most famous of these engines for his siege of Stirling Castle in 1304. He named it 'Warwolf' and it was described by contemporaries as a horrible weapon, said to be able to throw 250-pound missiles over 600 feet. It had huge impact; the building of it was watched by ladies from a specially constructed terrace and, just before the beast was completed, the garrison offered its surrender. It is a comment on Edward I's character that he refused to allow anyone to enter or leave until he had tried it out. Siege weapons were not just about knocking down walls, however; in fact given the thickness of most castle walls this was not their prime function. They could also launch firepots, dead animals in an attempt to cause disease amongst the garrison or, as at Rochester during William Rufus' reign, flies that stung the men and covered their food. At Nicaea in 1097 the crusaders even threw the heads of captured Muslims over the walls to terrify the garrison into surrender.

In all of these techniques there seems to be no immediately obvious role for the knightly warrior. Sieges were the preserve of the footsoldier, the archer and the crossbowman. The erection and manning of siege engines and the digging of mines required specialist technicians, who were rarely, if ever, of knightly rank. In this view the knight had nothing to offer as there was no role for cavalry. Of course, this was not wholly true. Foraging parties needed protection and the area beyond the encampment had to be patrolled for signs of relief forces or sorties, all duties for a horseman. As we have seen, moreover, the knight was not solely a mounted combatant – he was equally capable of fighting on foot or on horseback. In the siege he was as much involved in the combat as the ordinary *pedites*. Granted, he was not likely to be found with pick in hand or hauling on the ropes of a trebuchet (although, as we have



The formidable keep at Rochester Castle. Clearly visible is the one rounded tower, rebuilt after King John undermined it during his siege of 1215. (Corbis)



A *trebuchet* being used against the walls of a town. (Bridgeman Art Library)

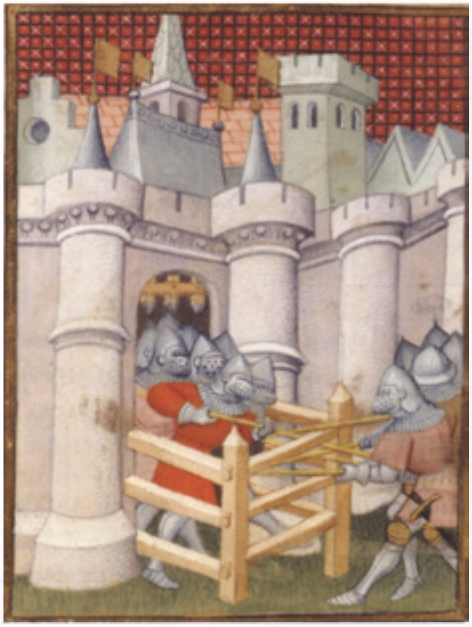
seen, even kings like Richard the Lionheart might add their skill with a bow to the besiegers' efforts). However, Joinville and Louis IX's brother the Count of Artois, and their *familiae*, knights all, stood guard over the belfries at Damietta. As well-equipped and well-trained warriors it was the knights who were at the forefront of the action, leading the assaults and sallies. Even without their mounts they were still the most effective combatants.

When the siege lines had settled down for the long haul the slower pace of the siege might allow knights the opportunity for more chivalric endeavours. The chronicler Froissart records a large number of *pas d'armes* taking place during sieges. Like béhourds, these were *ad hoc* small scale engagements, such as the daily outings of Matilda's garrison out of Winchester to joust against Stephen's besieging knights, or the joust fought by Bertrand du Guesclin against Guillaume de Blancbourc during the siege of Rennes in 1347. Although fought *a l'ontrance*, they were more diversions than battles.

BATTLE

In comparison to sieges and campaigns battles were rare events. Amongst English monarchs Hastings was the Conqueror's only setpiece battle and Henry II never took part in one. Edward I experienced defeat at Lewes in 1258 and commanded to victory at Evesham in 1264, but despite campaigning in the Holy Land, Wales, Flanders and Scotland only fought a battle once afterwards, at Falkirk in 1298. Edward III, the great war-leader, only fought battle on land twice, at Hallidon Hill in 1333 against the Scots and against the French at Crécy in 1346, and at sea once, against the French fleet at Sluys in 1340. They were, however, significant events. The majority of medieval battles were decisive in their result, with a clear winner and loser on the field and, even if they were not all as politically significant as Hastings, they very often brought an end to the campaign of which they were a part. They were seen as such by contemporaries, and commanders would seek to avoid them unless they considered the odds to be in their favour.

They also had a cultural significance for the knightly class. We have already noted that Geoffrey de Charny said that battle gave the knight the greatest opportunity to show his abilities with the broadest range of weapons. It was in battle that he was able to provide the ultimate proof of his prowess, and where the greatest renown was to be found. Unsurprisingly, battles were often attended by ritualized actions. The battle of Lewes, fought between Henry III and the rebel barons of the reform movement, led by Simon de Montfort, was preceded by proclamations of *diffidatio* on both sides: literally a withdrawal of faith, the annulling of the feudal contract between lord and subject. The unfurling of banners was also considered an essential precursor, not only indicating an intent to fight but also proclaiming the identities of those taking the field and their right to engage in war. Many of Froissart's accounts of battle begin with the armies lacing on their helmets and unfurling their banners. He tells us that preparing to cross the river Lis at Commines in 1382, prior to their victory over the Flemings at Rosebecque, the French army 'tightened their arms, buckled their helmets on their head in proper manner and, advancing through the marshes which are contiguous to the river, marched in order of battle, with banners and pennons displayed, as if they were immediately to engage'. Similarly, before Bouvines Philippe Augustus was told that the Imperial forces were advancing with 'their horses covered, the banners unfurled, the sergeants and foot soldiers up front', clear signs they intended battle. The English knight Sir John Chandos waited until the battle of Nájera in April



Men-at-arms fighting at the 'barriers'. Froissart often records that the knights from each side would ride out meeting at the 'barriers' – the temporary fortifications on the outskirts of a town – to perform *pas d'armes*. (© British Library)

1367 before unfurling his banner for the first time, thus showing himself as a banneret capable of supporting a retinue, despite the fact that he had been commanding his retinue since the start of the campaign and had been a banneret for over six years, having received the estate of Saint-Saveur-le-Vicomte in 1360. Certain of the secular orders of chivalry that grew up in the 14th century, when setting the criteria for the various augmentations of their badges in recognition of valorous deeds of arms, often made a point of stipulating that only in engagements where banners were raised were the achievements valid. The Order of the Knot, created in Naples around 1350, instructed that its members were to wear a badge of a tied knot until they had participated in a battle in which banners were raised, against a force of at least 50 enemy, and were either the first to attack the enemy, capture their banner or beat it to the ground, or capture the captain. After this achievment, they were entitled to wear the knot untied.

Whilst Froissart might have been wrong in his assertion that the Black Prince and several of his followers were knighted on the field of Crécy (in fact they had been knighted in the church of St Vigor at Quettehou shortly after the English army had landed on French shores: an equally auspicious moment), it does show that the eve of battle was considered to be a most appropriate time to dub new knights. The romances are full of such occurrences but it also happened in reality. Guy de Namur, the leader of the Flemish rebels at Courtrai and son of the Count of Flanders, was said to have knighted 30 of the leaders of the urban militias on the eve of the battle. This was topped by King James of Portugal who, on the eve of his battle against the Castilians at Aljubarotta in 1385, knighted 60 Portuguese and English squires.

The Church was involved in the spiritual well-being of the warriors. Priests would perform the Eucharist for troops, ensuring they were shriven in case of their death on the field and also to fortify them for the coming battle. Most of the lordly retinues contained priests, the chaplains who would have been a regular part of the lord's household, and the Church routinely gave dispensations permitting knights to make use of temporary altars so that they could celebrate Mass whilst on campaign. Joinville tells us that during Lent of 1250 he was so sick, with both scurvy and a fever, that he was bedridden. His priest, who seems to have been no less sick, came to his bedside to celebrate Mass. Even here there might be practical considerations: the 12th-century writer William of Newburgh records how Henry I hired a priest as his personal chaplain after being impressed by the speed with which he said Mass. According to the Norman sources, the priests who had accompanied William's army spent the night before the battle of Hastings in vigil and prayer for victory.

Such prayers and rituals continued onto the day of battle. As the armies formed up priests would move amongst the troops offering blessings and comfort. At the battle of Northallerton in 1138 the priests wore white vestments clearly distinguishing them from the warriors. As the army moved into the fray the priests, including Bishop Ralph of the Orkneys, stood on the hill above praying for God's intercession against the Scots. They focused their prayers around a *caroccio*, a cart on which was fixed a ship's mast bearing the banners of three local saints: Peter the Apostle (the patron of York Cathedral), John of Beverley and Wilfrid of Ripon. This was an unusual thing in northern European warfare, so much so that it gave its name to the battle which is also known as the Battle of the Standard. Such practices were much more common amongst the town militia of Italian urban armies, where the *caroccio* was as much a symbol of town pride as a spiritual powerhouse. Individual saints' banners, and sometimes even their relics, were carried onto the battlefield on a regular basis as a means of obtaining divine aid in the coming conflict. This was vitally important as battle was often seen as a judicial duel writ large; the outcome being a judgement by God on the righteousness (or otherwise) of the armies' cause.

At Northallerton one of the commanders, Walter d'Espec, gave an oration to the Anglo-Norman troops. It focused, according to Aelred of Rievaulx, on the strength of the Anglo-Normans under difficult circumstances, the need to protect English women and children from a barbarous enemy and the anti-Christian acts of the Scots, and the divine aid of the saints and God. Such pre-battle harangues are common in the records of medieval battles, but, whilst they might be the words of the chronicler rather than the warrior leaders, the evidence does suggest an attempt to bolster the morale of their troops by pre-battle orations. They tend to have common themes, generally making reference to the righteousness of the cause, the support of Christ and the saints, the weaknesses of the enemy. Perhaps more realistic is William of Malmesbury's record of the actions of Henry I on the eve of Robert Curthose's expected invasion, the king offering tactical advice to his footsoldiers.

As we have seen, armies were split into their divisions at the onset of the campaign. This meant that when the army arrived on the field it was a relatively simple matter of ranging the divisions across it. Quite where each ward was placed in relation to the others depended on the circumstances of the field and the enemy, of course, but on the whole the main guard was placed so as to be first to contact the enemy. Far from being a case of 'line 'em up and let 'em go', as most popular depictions of battle would have it, battle plans were made. They were generally quite simple, nicely summarized by the leader of Henry I's *familia* at Bourgthéroulde in 1124: 'the best plan is for one section of our men to dismount ready for battle and fight on foot, while the rest remain mounted ready for the fray. Let us also place a force of archers in the front line and compel the enemy troops to slow down by wounding their horses.' Plans were important, and it was necessary for them to be kept simple for once the armies engaged

THE ARCHERS' BATTLE? AGINCOURT

Few medieval battles have such iconic status, at least for the English-speaking world, as Agincourt. Courtesy of Shakespeare, ably assisted by Lawrence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh, the battle conjures up images of the victory of the mud-spattered common archer over the shining, aristocratic French knight. It caps the triumvirate of longbow victories, topping Crécy and Poitiers.

The narrative of Agincourt is familiar to all. Henry V invaded France in 1415 in pursuit of his claim to the French crown. Landing in the west of the Duchy of Normandy, he besieged Harfleur, which surrendered after two months when it became clear that no French army was coming to its relief. His army then turned to march across Normandy, aiming for the port of Calais and home. The decision was less about tweaking the nose of the French king with a stately progress through territory that had once been in the hands of the English crown, than about ensuring sufficient shipping to get his army, already suffering the hardships of campaign and first effects of dysentery, home.

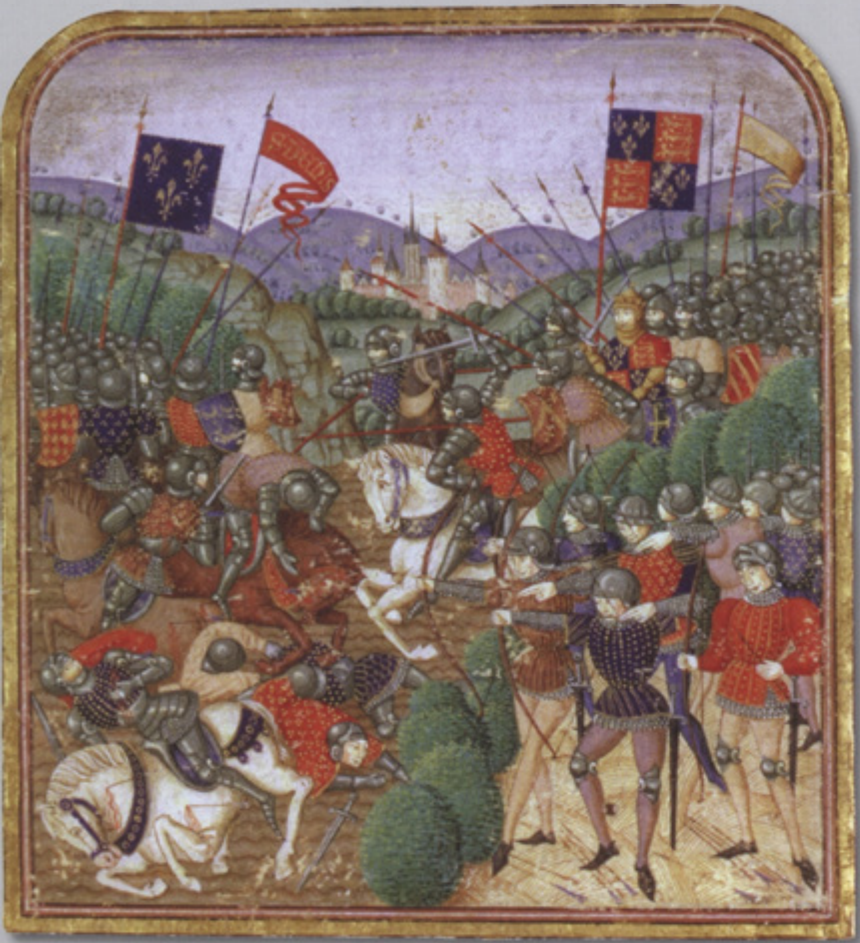
The English force struck out across the Norman countryside very swiftly, taking no time to invest any of the towns along the route. Henry had issued strict instructions forbidding the pillaging or burning of the countryside on pain of death. This may have been a political gesture – he was claiming lordship of the land after all – but also ensured that the small and vulnerable army stayed together and was slowed neither by stragglers nor by the burden of loot.

On 20 October French heralds endeavoured to arrange a time and place for a battle, but Henry equivocated, making plain that his intention was to reach Calais. The French army had by this time manoeuvred itself between Henry and his destination and battle was inevitable.

The armies that faced each other were uneven, but perhaps not hugely so. The English force left Southampton with 12,000 men, and whilst many had fallen it seems that Henry stood between the woods of Tramencourt and Agincourt with around 1,500 men-at-arms and 7,000 archers. The French army that faced them was around 12,000 strong, about two-thirds men-at-arms.

The battle commenced with a charge of French cavalry, perhaps 800 to 1,000 strong. These 'crack men-at-arms who had the best mounts', had been tasked with dispersing the English archers so that the main wards, all on foot, might advance against the English with impunity. The first flights of arrows, 'as dense as a hailstorm', broke them, however, and as they turned and fled they ran into the advancing men-at-arms, disordering their ranks. The situation was made worse as the archers' arrows coming into the flanks of the advancing men-at-arms, 'which by their very force pierced their sides and the visors of their helmets', caused them to close in on the centre, compounding the already densely packed ranks, disordering and slowing their advance, which was already hindered by the rutted and muddy ground.

Slowed, disordered but did not stop it. Neither at Agincourt, nor at the other two 'longbow' victories of Crécy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356 were the French assaults completely stopped by firepower alone. The archers on the flanks may have continued to put arrows into the struggling mass of French men-at-arms, but it was their English counterparts who did the greatest execution. It was they, not the archers, who created the piles of dead so vividly described



A 15th-century depiction of Agincourt. The French army flee across the ploughed field, falling to the arrows of the English bows. (Bridgeman Art Library)

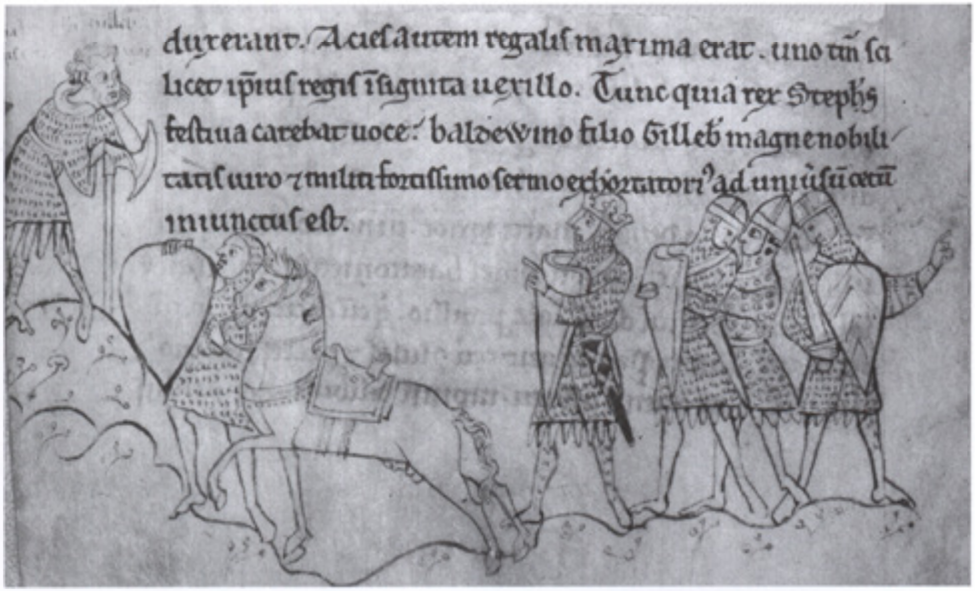
by the chroniclers, so high that they had to climb up on top of them in order to 'butcher their enemies down below with swords, axes and other weapons'. In the *mêlée* the archers used their nimbleness to attack the flanks and rears of those already engaged, using their knives, hangers and lead mallets to dispatch men as they fell.

The battle was an overwhelming defeat for the French and their casualties were acute, all the greater because Henry, fearing an attack by the French rearguard, who had remained unengaged, ordered the prisoners killed so that they might not pick up weapons and renew the assault. It was by no means decisive. Whilst Shakespeare may have moved straight to the negotiating table and the Treaty of Troyes which saw Henry recognized as heir to the French throne and betrothed him to the Princess Catherine, the French and English did not. There would be five more years of bitter campaigning and much political manoeuvring before Henry would come close to achieving his aims.

it was almost impossible for a commander to alter the direction of a battle. New orders had to be given by trumpet calls or the movement of banners. This limited them to fairly simple instructions: retreat, advance, move left, move right. If the banner went forward, so did the men; at the battle of Nájera in 1366, the Chandos Herald records the Black Prince giving the order to advance with the words 'Forward banner! God help us to our right!' This was echoed by the Duke of Lancaster who cried 'Forward, forward banner! Let us take the Lord God as our protector and let each acquit himself honourably!' Similarly, if the banner moved to the right or left then the understanding was that the troops should follow it, as at the battle of Mansourah when Louis IX ordered the redeployment of his army to the right by having the *Oriflamme*, the sacred royal banner, moved to the right. Anything more complex had to be conveyed by word of mouth, sending a messenger into the fray to find the particular commander. This was made all the more difficult by the fact that commanders were expected to lead from the front, and would invariably be closely involved with the fighting. Like the men they led, they were warriors whose prowess and status were enhanced through their actions on the field of battle. Not only did this limit their tactical vision, making it very difficult for them to have an understanding of what was going on around them on the field, but the need to enhance their individual prowess could conflict with the pursuit of the battle plan.

Agincourt is a key example of this. We are fortunate enough that a copy of the battle plan drawn up by the French commanders in the days prior to the battle has survived. It specifies the normal formations of vanguard, main guard and rearguard, formed in successive lines one behind the other comprising dismounted knights and men-at-arms. These were flanked by two wings of crossbows and two blocks of cavalry, one of which comprised men on the best horses and wearing the strongest armour who were tasked with sweeping the English bowmen from the field. The plan was that as the vanguard began their advance on foot, the crossbowmen would close range and the cavalry would begin their charge. By the time the vanguard came to hand-strokes the combination of the crossbowmen's firepower and the horsemen's charge would have destroyed the archers and disordered the men-at-arms. When it came to the battle itself, however, the plan was changed, in part because two of the larger retinues were still marching up to meet with the army. The vanguard was also front loaded and all of the great nobles insisted on being part of it in order to share in the glory of destroying what appeared to be a weak English force. This meant that when the vanguard was overthrown most of the army's commanders were lost too, and no one was in position to redirect the second and third lines.

The argument between Gloucester and Hereford over which of them had the right to lead the attack at Bannockburn led to precipitate charges and casualties on the first



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Walter d'Espec addresses the royal army before the battle of Lincoln, 1141. Standing before him is King Stephen who was not a loud enough speaker to give the harangue himself. (Topfoto)

day of the battle. Even senior commanders were not immune to this kind of martial ardour. As Louis IX's army landed at Damietta, the king saw his banner reach the beach ahead of him. Picking up his shield he leapt into the surf and waded ashore and, on reaching it, enquired who the men on the horizon were. When he was told that they were Saracens he lunged forward desperate to attack them, and had to be restrained by more level heads, who suggested he wait for the rest of the army to form up first.

For all these reasons battle plans were generally kept very simple. Reserves were held under the direct control of the senior commander so that he might choose the time to commit them but also so that he was kept out of the immediate fight and could keep a broader perspective on the engagement. Any flank marches or delayed attacks, such as that by the second unit of French cavalry against the English baggage at Agincourt, had their timing and direction factored in before the engagement began.

How did the knight feel in the midst of battle? What went through his mind? These are perhaps the most fascinating of questions we can ask about medieval battle, but they are also the most difficult to answer. The medieval knight was not noted for his introspection and contemplation. Very few accounts of battle are written by men with martial experience, and those which are can disappoint. William of Poitiers, for example, who writes a highly partial history of the deeds of William the Conqueror, had been a knight in the duke's household at some point, but his narrative is heavily based upon classical texts and has almost nothing to say about the way the warrior felt, being more concerned with praising Duke William as a leader and William of Poitiers

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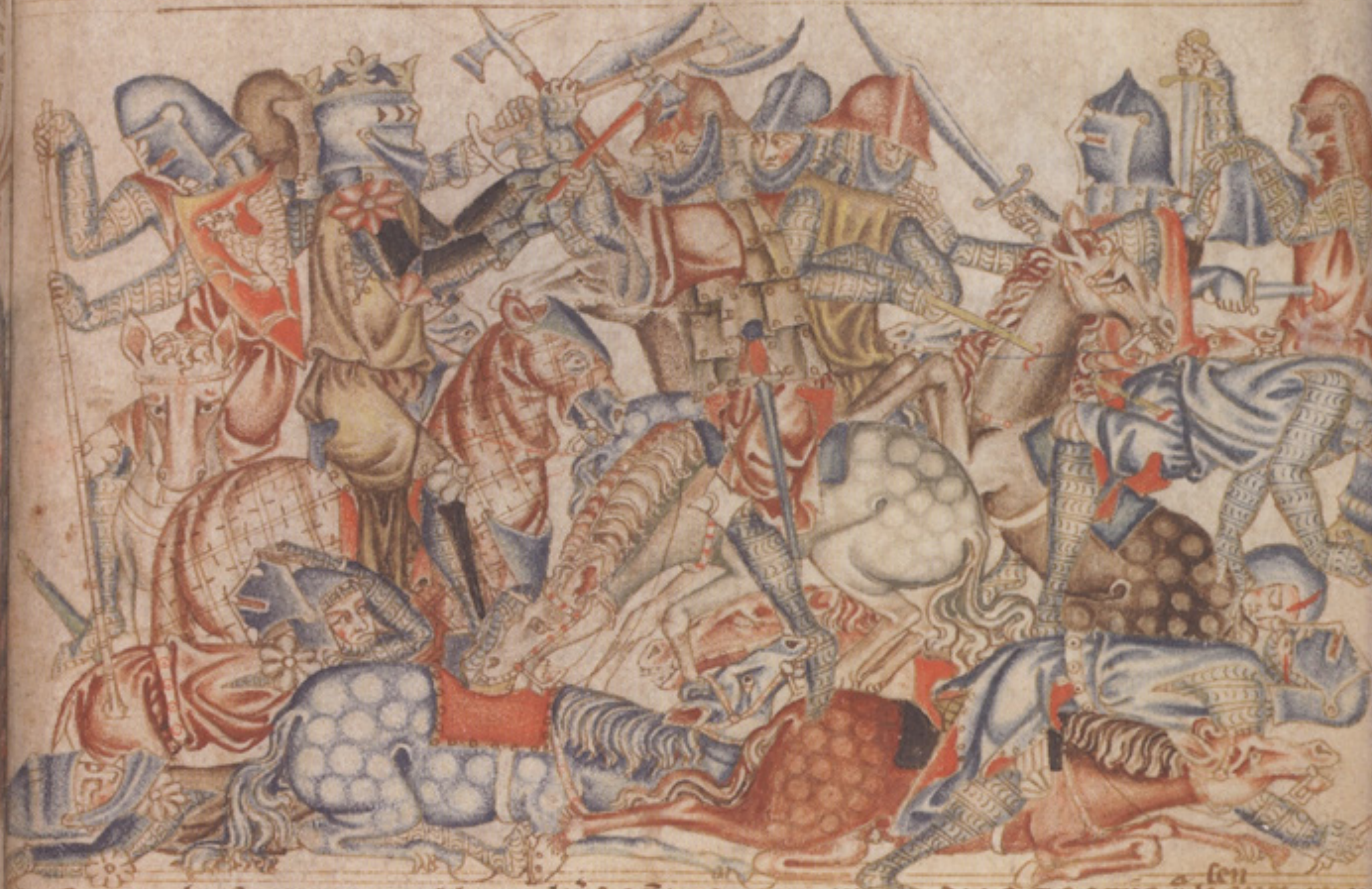

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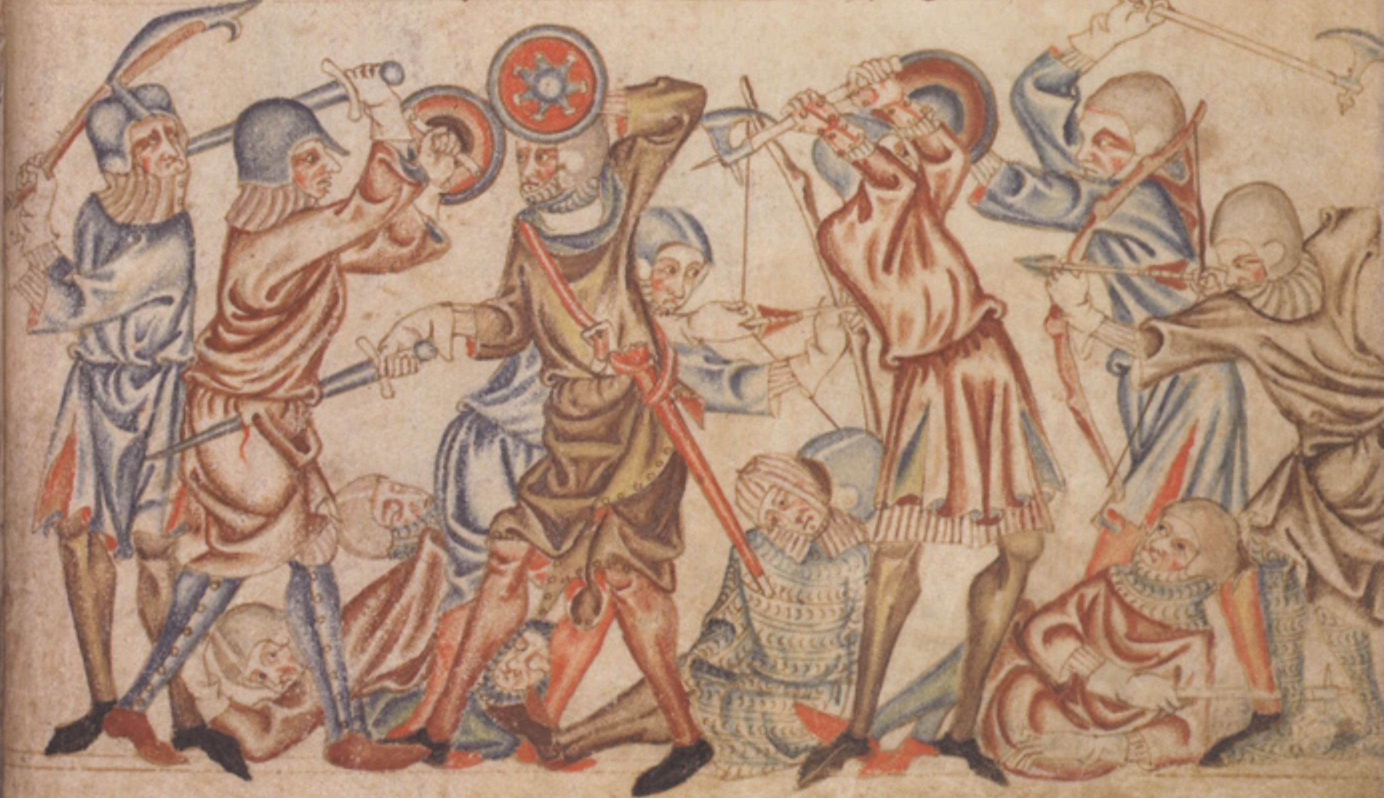


himself as a scholar. Similarly, the account of the Fourth Crusade by Geoffrey de Villehardouin is very much a dispassionate narrative rather than being a personal memoir. We get a much more personal account in Joinville's *Life of Saint Louis*, but even here, when it comes to the description of battle, it is the action he witnessed and was a part of rather than the things he felt that come to the fore.

Even when we do get what appears to be the emotional response of a warrior to battle, we must be careful. Can we really believe the 12th-century knight and poet Bertrand du Born, for example, when he writes:

> I love it when the chargers throw everything and everybody into confusion, And I enjoy seeing strong castles besieged, and bastions broken down and shattered, And seeing the army all surrounded by ditches, protected by palisades of stout tree trunks jammed together ... I tell you, neither in eating, drinking, nor sleeping, do I find what I feel when I hear the shout 'At them!' from both sides, and the neighing of riderless horses in the confusion or the call 'Help! Help!' or when I see great and small together fall on the grass of the ditches; or when I espy dead men who still have pennoned lances in their ribs.

It sounds very much like the sentiments in a heroic epic like *The Song of Roland* or an Arthurian romance. It is hard to believe that knights really felt like that about battle although, as we have seen, the chivalric ethos could have a major impact on the way in which the knight conducted himself in war.

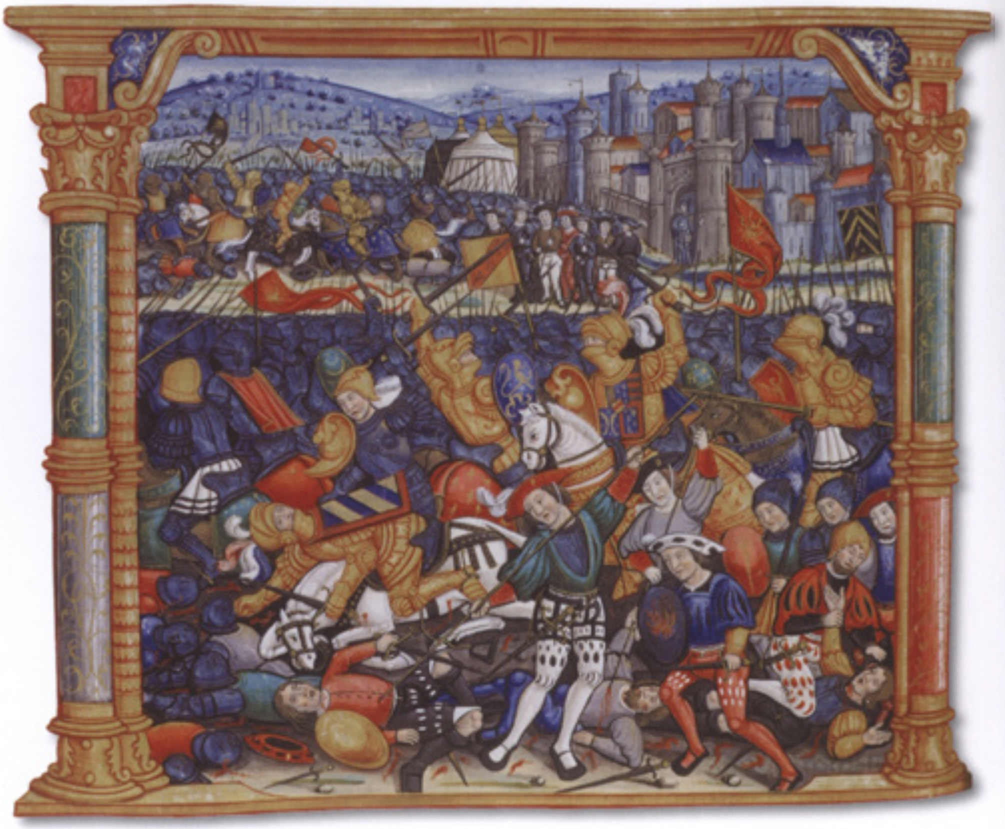
Gerald of Wales seems to reinforce this idea of the knight's lust for battle, when he has the Anglo-Norman commander Raymond le Gros discussing the fate of prisoners taken at Wexford by Anglo-Normans in 1170, saying that:

> In the midst of martial conflict it is a soldier's duty, clad in his helmet, to thirst for blood, to concentrate on killing, to plead his case with his sword alone, to show himself in all his actions an unyielding warrior, displaying a ferocity more than ordinarily brutal. But by the same token, when the turmoil of battle is over and he has laid aside his arms, ferocity too should be laid aside, a humane code of behaviour should be once more adopted...

Again, however, we must be careful not too assume too much from what are almost certainly not Raymond's actual words but Gerald's carefully crafted prose.

So much of what we read is like this: examples of battlefield courage and fear dressed up to reinforce the chivalric ideals. The 14th-century *The Vows of the Heron* has what might be a more realistic perspective on the question; after describing the banter and the boasting that takes place in the warmth of the tavern it continues:

Opposite: The Holkham picture bible of 1327–35 separates out the warfare of *'Le grant peuple'* from *'le comoune gents'* but apart from their armour and horses there is little to distinguish the two groups, particularly in the ferocity of the combat. (© British Library)



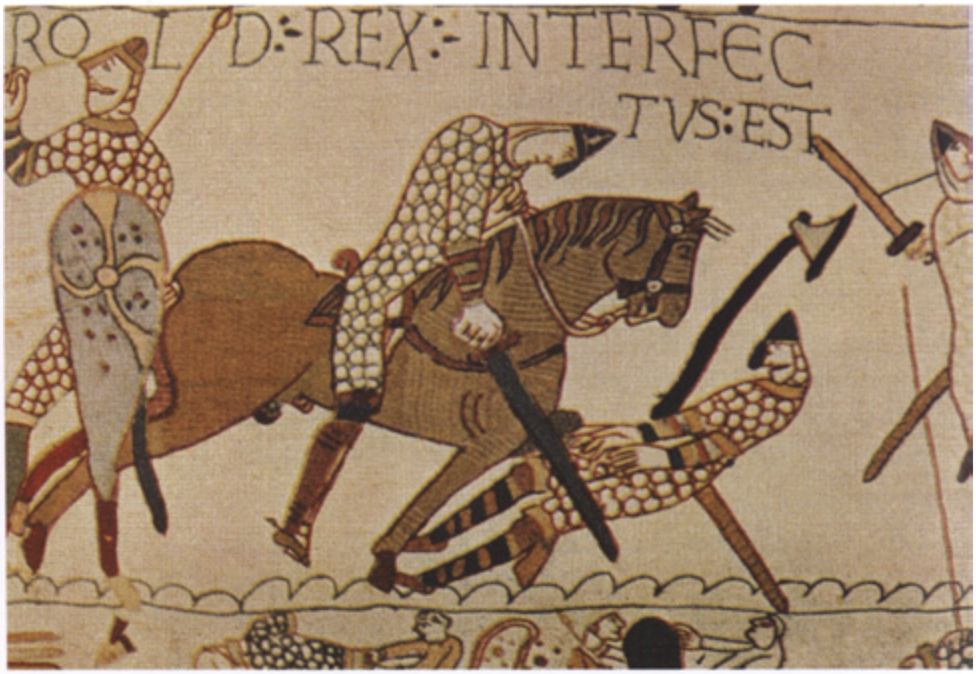
This image of the battle of Nancy, 1477, shows both the spectacle and chaos of a medieval battle. (The Art Archive)

> But when we are in the fields, on our swift war-horses, our shields at our necks and our spears lowered, and the great cold benumbs us all, our limbs fail both behind and before, and our enemies are approaching towards us, then we should wish to be in a cellar so great, that we should never make a vow of one kind or another...

Given the insights we can get from Jean le Bel's personal narrative of the hardships of the Weardale campaign, we might have expected a similar level of honesty from him, and it is a pity that it did not result in a battle between the English and Scots so that he could have described it (although Jean might not have agreed with us).

It is possible to glean something of what the warrior experienced from within the primary sources. The spectacle of the armies is a common theme. Froissart describes the French army marching against Hugh Calverley's garrison at Bergues in 1383 as 'a beautiful sight to behold ... and such numbers of men-at-arms that they could not encompass them: they seemed like a moving forest so upright did they hold their lances'. Henry of Huntingdon describes King Stephen's force riding to the relief of Malmesbury in 1152, saying that it 'was indeed a huge army, densely packed with numerous nobles, gleaming with golden banners, both very terrible and beautiful'. Some of this will be literary hyperbole, true, but if one considers that pitched battle saw more men gathered in one place than the population of many towns, certainly more than most would have seen in their life time. The brightly decorated banners, surcoats and caparisons, with the sun flashing off the armour and weapons, the visual effect must indeed have been stunning.

We also get a sense of the noise and confusion of the field, the horses whinnying and snorting, the drumming of their hooves on the turf. The shouting of battle cries, each retinue with their own, and the clash of sword on sword, on shield, or on helm, was described as being like that of men chopping wood or a thousand blacksmiths at their anvils. The trumpets and drums could be equally terrifying, particularly those of the Saracens. Henry of Huntingdon, writing about the crusaders on the road to Antioch, tells us that they 'were put furiously to the slaughter. For their horses, unable to endure the strange shouts, the sound of war trumpets, and the banging of drums, would not respond to the spurs. Our men, also, shocked by such a great noise, did not know where they were.' The Count of Jaffa, arriving off Damietta in his galley, made use of local musical instruments to increase the effect of his arrival: 'What with the flapping of pennons, the booming of drums and the screech of Saracen horns on board this vessel you would have thought a thunderbolt was falling from the skies.' Add to this the anticipation, the inevitable rush of adrenalin, and the sense of



The death of King Harold at Hastings may not have resulted from his receiving an arrow in the eye, but was no less devastating for that. With his death, and that of his brothers Gyrth and Leofwine, the English army was left leaderless. (Topfoto) dislocation from the field as both hearing and vision were constrained by helmet and visor; the fear and apprehension must have been almost palpable.

One of the commentators on Courtrai noted that 'our knights were very much afraid of these foot-soldiers armed with lances [pikes], whom they had to fight with their swords and short weapons. The [pikes] were longer than the swords and daggers and their impenetrable ranks ... were as strong as wall.' Such fear is rarely described openly in the sources and certainly not by those who were there. The dishonour attached to cowardice and fear was too great for it to be mentioned. Perhaps the closest Joinville comes to telling of his fear in battle comes when he describes having to guard the two towers protecting the crusaders' causeway. Joinville and his retinue were tasked with mounting guard on them at night, but the Egyptians used their engines to throw both Greek fire and stones against them in an attempt to burn the towers down. Joinville tells us that he and his men were 'sick at heart' but that, during the Count of Anjou's watch of the towers during the day, the Saracens succeeded in destroying them. 'God showed himself very gracious towards myself and my knights in this matter,' says Joinville, for if they had mounted guard that night they would have been in great danger of death.

That fear was somewhat offset by the self-confidence and sheer arrogance of the knight. Some of this came from the effectiveness of their armour. Feeling invulnerable they were encouraged, indeed expected, to fight bravely. There is in the Bishop of the Orkneys' battlefield oration before Northallerton, at least as it is recorded by Henry of Huntingdon, a sense of derision in his statement 'Your head is covered by a helmet, your breast by a hauberk, your legs by greaves, your whole body by a shield. The enemy cannot find where to strike when he looks closely and discovers that you are enclosed in steel. What is there to doubt as we march forward against the unarmed and naked?' Wearing armour also changed the posture of the wearer. It made him stand more erect, square his shoulders and lift his head, forcing him into a more aggressive stance. Not only would all this make him appear more fearsome, it would also make him feel more confident and powerful. The Italian chronicler Filippo Villani writes of the 14th-century English *condottieri* mercenaries 'when they take off their armour, the pages presently set to polishing, so that when they appear in battle their arms seem like mirrors, and they so much more terrible.' The defenders of Montferrand Castle, besieged by Louis the Fat of France in 1126, 'found themselves in dread of this awesome army of the French, which was so different from theirs. They marvelled at the splendour of hauberks and helmets gleaming in the sun. Taken aback by this sight alone, they gave up the outer defences and took themselves just in time into the tower and the area around it.'

The knight's arrogance was also based on the knowledge of his ability and power. Although he might fear a tightly packed wall of spears, he also believed in the ferocity of his charge, the savagery and power of which would often be sufficient to break that cohesion. He knew that, if it did, these untried men would waver and flee as the London militia did before the future Edward I at Lewes in 1264 or as the Flemish militias did before the French at Mons-en-Pévèle in 1304, just two years after the former's victory at Courtrai.

That self-confidence could get the warrior into trouble, however. It was the Count of Artois' ignoring the advice of the Templars' Grand Master that led to his death in the streets of Mansourah. Having pursued the fleeing Muslims, he found himself cut off in the narrow streets and attacked by the citizens from the rooftops. He and his retinue, as well as Longespée and 280 of the Knights Templar, who had followed Artois fearing that they would be accused of cowardice if they did not, were killed. His son was to lose his life at Courtrai a little over 50 years later, cut down by the Flemish militiamen whom he had dismissed before the battle with the words 'Even if there are many of them, one hundred knights are worth a thousand men on foot!' We are told that when the English army broke up and fled at Hastings some of them made a last stand in some broken ground known as the '*malfosse*' where a number of Norman knights were killed. The pursuit following the English victory at Poitiers lasted longer than the battle, as English men-at-arms and archers hunted down and captured the fleeing French knights for ransom.

Medieval armies were brittle things, lacking much of the training and *esprit de corps* that hold modern permanent armies together. As such their cohesion could be destroyed much more quickly and dramatically. The death of a commander, or even the rumour of his death, could be enough, as happened at Hastings in 1066. The rumour passed through the Norman army that Duke William had been killed and part of the army began to rout (the sources closest to the duke specify that it was Breton knights who were the first to break). The duke had to ride in front of his fleeing men and, in an act lifted directly from the pages of Caesar, pushed back his helmet to reveal his face and declared 'Look at me? I am alive, and with God's help I will conquer. What madness is persuading you to flee? What way is open to escape?' The subsequent death of Harold and his brothers Gyrth and Leofwine in the ensuing counter-attack, leaving the English army leaderless, may have proved the trigger for the English troops to flee.

At Brémule it was the defeat of the French vanguard and the charge of Helias of Maine's mounted reserve into the flank of the main French body that caused the entire force to turn and flee, Louis VI's household knights taking him by the bridle to get him off the field. At Courtrai the loss of their commander, Robert d'Artois, and the destruction of both the vanguard and the main guard meant that many of the remaining knights turned and fled.

CAPTURE, WOUNDS AND THE RISK OF DEATH

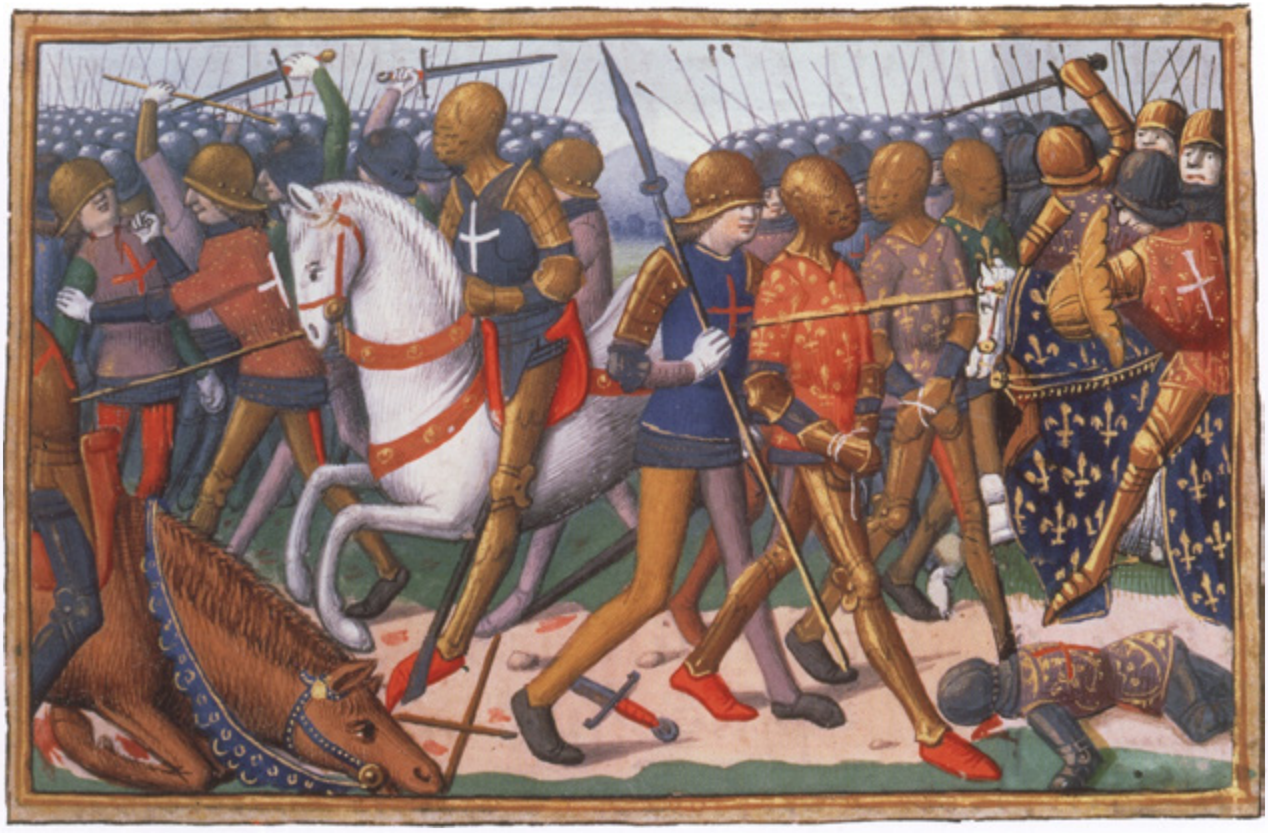
It is often said that the majority of casualties in battle were inflicted during the rout. A fleeing man turning his back on his foe and making no attempt to defend himself was much easier to kill, especially if he had thrown off his heavy armour to speed his escape. Just as often, however, it was mischance rather than enemy action that killed men as they ran. Large numbers might be drowned as they sought to escape across rivers. Many of the Londoners fleeing Edward's knights at Lewes drowned in the Ouse; a large number of English were killed at the Bannock burn, slowed up as they tried to cross it; and against the Scots at Myton on 1319 more were killed fleeing across the river Swale than were killed on the battlefield.

The battles themselves were far from bloodless but, as with determining the number of combatants, the exact number of casualties is difficult to ascertain from the source material. Quite often the chroniclers will only put it in terms of mass, writing that 'many were killed' or 'hundreds' or 'thousands', aiming to give an impression of scale rather than an accurate account of losses. After all, they were unlikely to be privy to such information. Just as with the number of combatants, the numbers of dead are often inflated, particularly if the chronicler is partial. Nor will we always get complete figures. Orderic Vitalis tells us that at the battle of Brémule only three were killed, but these are the knights; he says nothing of the footsoldiers who fought. Emphasis was inevitably placed on naming the nobles who fell, the men of note and those from the local area whose families patronized the chroniclers' work or abbey.

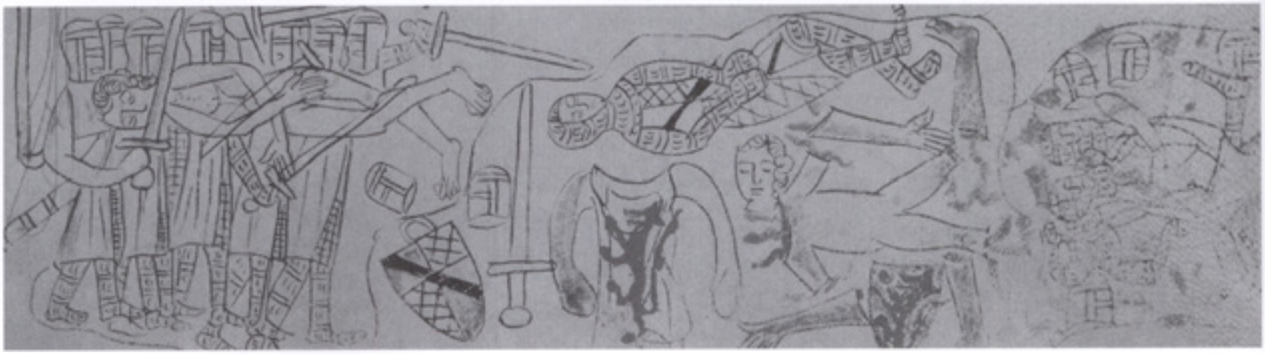
The knightly combatant was, perhaps, the man who risked the least on the field. As has been noted his armour offered him substantial protection from weapons, whilst the chivalric ethos that he shared with many of his opponents might also serve him well. It would be wrong, however, to assume from this that battle offered no risks for the knight. The historical narratives do give details of wounds suffered by individuals. Joinville records how during the battle of Mansourah Érard de Siverey, one of his household, received a blow that cut through his nose so that it was left dangling over his lips. Although he survived for most of the battle, indeed riding off to get reinforcements for Joinville's beleaguered household, he died at its end. The future Henry V was hit in the face by an arrow at the battle of Shrewsbury in 1403. But such wounds need not be fatal. Surgical techniques were not as basic as one might think and it was possible for men to survive quite terrible wounds. The skull of body number 16 from the excavation of the mass grave at the Wars of the Roses battlefield of Towton, fought in 1461, showed a blade wound that had cut through his lower jaw and teeth on his left side, but the wound had clearly healed and there was no indication of infection. One of Joinville's knights, Raoul de Wanou, had been hamstrung during the fight at Mansourah, but survived to go into captivity with his lord, being carried to and from the privy by one of his captors. Similarly we are told that the future Henry V survived his arrow-wound at Shrewsbury, primarily through the skills of a royal surgeon whose use of a specialist surgical tool suggests particular knowledge of battlefield surgery.

The death of a knight was often seen as something to be mourned and regretted, not to be sought or celebrated. When Sir John Chandos was killed at Lussac in 1369, Froissart tells us that his death was regretted by both French and English, saying:

> Thus it happens through life. The English loved him for all the excellent qualities he was possessed of. The French hated him because they were afraid of him. Not but that I have heard him at the time regretted by renowned knights in France; for they said it was a great pity he was slain, and that, if he could have been taken prisoner, he



An image of the battle of Agincourt, made some 70 years later, depicts French noblemen being marched off by footsoldiers, but not the desperate and muddy fight that it was, nor the effects of Henry's order to kill the prisoners. (Bridgeman Art Library)



Evesham saw the end of the baronial revolt against Henry III. By the end of the battle Simon de Montfort was killed and his body hacked to pieces, the head sent by Roger Mortimer to his wife Maud at Wigmore Castle as a trophy. (Bridgeman Art Library)

> was so wise and full of devices, he would have found some means of establishing a peace between France and England; and was so much beloved by the king of England and his court, that they would have believed what he should have said in preference to all others.

As Orderic says of the knights at Brémule, they sought to capture their enemies not to kill them.

Whilst this was for the most part true, there were occasions when the surrender of a knight was neither practical nor desired. One account of the battle of Evesham in 1265 suggests that Edward and the Earl of Gloucester assigned 12 knights, including the third of the royalist commanders Roger Mortimer, to pick out Simon de Montfort, leader of the rebels, and ensure his death on the field. Edward was seeking to end the protracted conflict between the king and the baronial party and the clearest way to do this was to kill the figurehead of that movement, Montfort himself. Similarly politically motivated killings took place during the Wars of the Roses, renowned for the slaughter of the nobility they witnessed.

When knights faced non-knightly combatants the rules of chivalry no longer applied and the capture of knights for ransom was not a concern. At Courtrai the Flemish refused to take prisoners, their leader Guy de Namur supposedly giving the command to 'kill all ... that has spurs on'. Being formed almost entirely of the low-born and merchant community, the Flemings could expect no mercy from the French aristocracy and so would offer none. The same was true of the Swiss in their wars against the French and Burgundians during the 14th and 15th centuries.

One of the key battlegrounds for the debate about the limits and reality of chivalry has been Henry V's order to execute French prisoners in the closing stages of the battle of Agincourt. Despite the seeming incongruity of the action, it is clear that contemporaries, both French and English, did not consider it to be an act requiring censure. There were practical reasons for the action. The English were outnumbered, and facing a renewed attack in their rear, the French knights had become a real threat again: in the rear surrounded by discarded weapons and with their fellows riding to their aid, the captives could have turned the tide of battle in favour of the French. That the men-at-arms refused to obey the order and that Henry's archers were the ones to do the deed, may have had more to do with the loss of ransoms than to any squeamishness on the part of those chivalric warriors.

The capture of a noble opponent brought about financial benefits, in both ransom and goods. The taking of prisoners boosted prestige and pocket. When King Jean II of France was taken at Poitiers there was an unseemly tussle amongst the men-at-arms to be the one to claim him. Eventually a French exile, Denis de Morbecque, was able to get the king to surrender to him by promising to lead him to the Black Prince. There were at least four different claimants to the ransom of Bertrand du Guesclin's younger brother Olivier and it took English courts over three years to sort out the details.

Ransoms were set according to the wealth and resources of the captive and, more importantly, according to their renown. As recalled previously, when the French knight and commander Bertrand du Guesclin was taken by the Black Prince during the Nájera campaign, he boasted to the prince that the French believed that Bertrand would never be ransomed because the prince was so afraid of his prowess. The prince retorted that this was not the case and that Bertrand could have his freedom for 100,000 francs, and Bertrand, keen to be free, took the prince at his word. Immediately the prince regretted his so easily granting the ransom but his father told him that having set the ransom they were honour-bound to hold to the terms. After he was captured by Duke Leopold of Austria on his way back from the Holy Land in 1192, and handed over to Henry, King of Germany, Richard the Lionheart's ransom was set at 150,000 marks (two-thirds going to Henry and a third to Leopold), an amount equal to three years of the Plantagenets' royal revenues. The ransoms of the ordinary knight would, obviously, be less but it was generally thought that an amount equating to a year's income of the captive's patrimony was a fair settlement.

The warrior who captured a knight might not see the whole ransom. If he were, say, an archer or other *pedes* then his lord would take a large part. In royal campaigns indentures often specified that 'great' prisoners taken were to be surrendered to the king in return for compensation at a set rate dependent on the status of the captive. Raising ransoms would take time, and often knights were paroled on the understanding that they would settle the debt; the payment was often guaranteed by friends of the captured man, or by the provision of hostages. Some knights bound themselves in confraternities, or brotherhoods, which would see them share the spoils from a campaign, but would also ensure payment of each other's ransom if captured. A few of the charters that record 12th-century grants of land include the condition that the vassal would redeem their lord should he be taken prisoner.

Defaulting on a ransom meant accusations of a breach of faith and attempts to sue the defaulter or his guarantors or challenge them to judicial combat. The captor might also resort to *deshonnoirement*, the public shaming of the defaulter, using the captive's coat of arms or an image of him armed inverted or reversed in a public place. The French *routier* La Hire rode on campaign with the arms of Robert de Commency, the guarantor of his defaulting prisoner Monsard d'Aisne, reversed at his horse's tail (it is interesting to note that the guarantor could share the defaulter's shame). It is a clear indication of how seriously such an insult was taken that Bertrand du Guesclin hanged the captain of Moncontour from his own battlements in full armour because he had slandered him with a breach of faith as a prisoner of the English by displaying du Guesclin's arms reversed.

Given the time it could take to see payment of a ransom, and the possibility that it might be defaulted on, some knights chose to sell their ransoms on. There was a lively speculation in ransoms, with men buying captives for a fraction of the expected payment, the idea being that the original captor would prefer a lesser amount up front to the promise of a larger amount in months' or even years' time. A speculator might make himself very wealthy in this way.

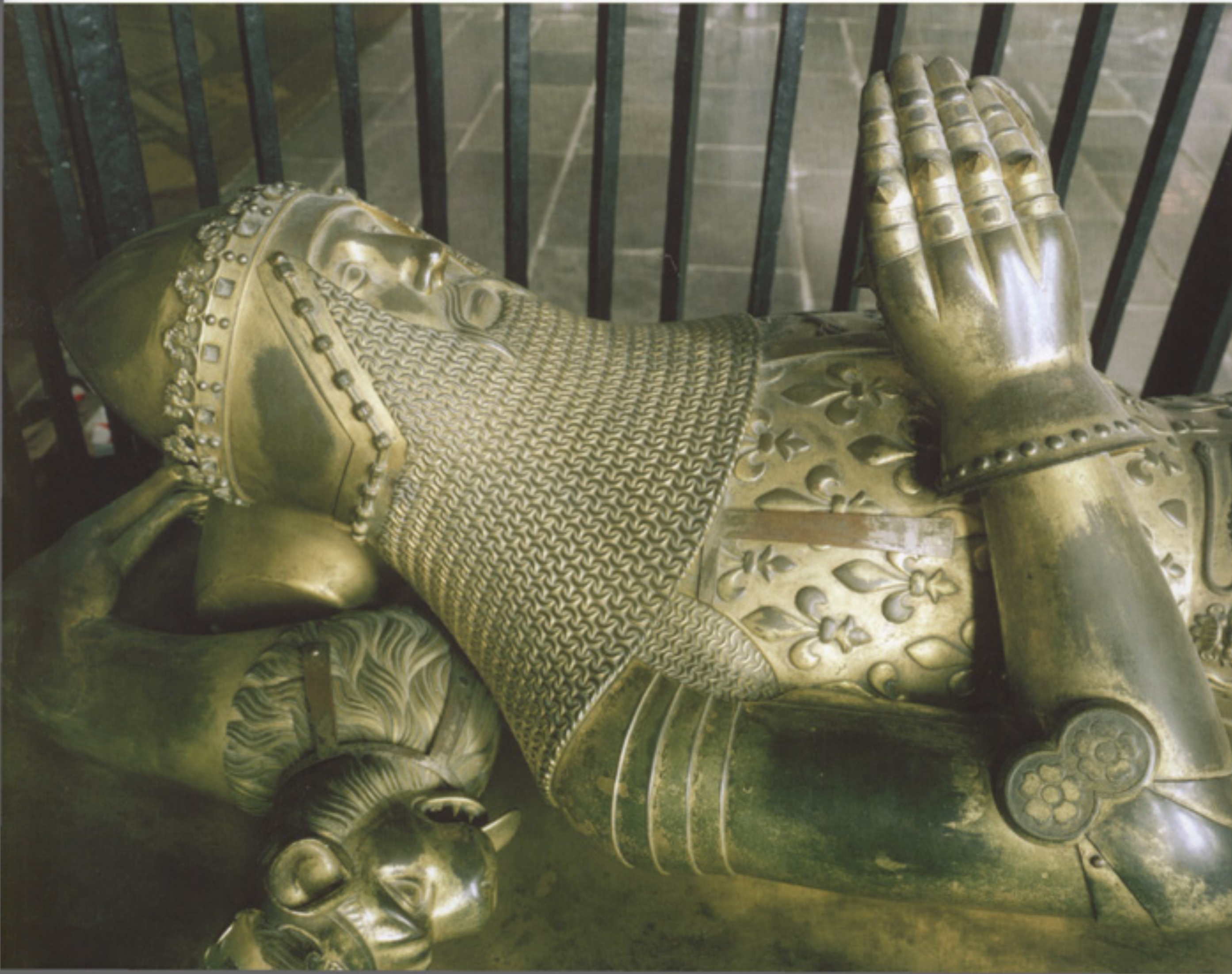
The most prestigious captives might not be paroled. Jean II of France spent four years in England whilst his ransom was being raised. He returned to England in 1364, ostensibly because his son Louis (who had been acting as hostage) had escaped from England and returned to France thus breaking the agreement with the English, although some have argued that he actually did so to escape the burdens of ruling the French realm. Robert Curthose, the eldest son of William the Conqueror, was confined by his younger brother Henry I after his defeat at Tinchebrai, being held at Devizes and then Cardiff castles.

Such 'imprisonment' need not be uncomfortable. Indeed, there was an expectation that a captive would be accommodated in the manner to which he was accustomed. Rather than occupying the Hollywood dungeon or *oubliette* the captive would often be treated more like a guest than a prisoner. Jean II was able to travel England and retained his regal position. His account books for the period show that he maintained a royal court about him as was fitting to his dignity. Similarly, after his defeat at Lincoln in 1141 King Stephen was kept in honourable confinement at Bristol, but showed a propensity to wander and so had to be confined in irons.

There were notable exceptions to this comfortable captivity. Sometimes captives were mistreated in order to speed payment of their ransoms or to encourage the surrender of towns and castles, but to refuse to ransom a captive taken in lawful war (as opposed to rebellion) was considered to be a terrible crime. The 11th-century knight Robert of Rhuddlan was infamous for refusing to ransom his captives, preferring instead to imprison them in his dungeons for long periods. Another Norman knight, Robert of Bêlleme, made a habit of incarcerating his prisoners and even torturing them; after one engagement some 300 prisoners were left to starve to death although he was offered large ransoms for their release. Edward I reprimanded one of his knights, John Fitz Marmaduke, for the degree of pleasure he took in the deaths of his enemies and the excesses of his cruelty.

We are told that the morning after Agincourt the French heralds were given permission to search the field in order to identify the dead knights and nobles; we should imagine the same task being performed after most battles for whilst the *pedites* and ignoble might be buried in massed graves such as those excavated at Wisby and Towton, the corpses of most knightly warriors would be returned home for burial, the

The effigy of the Black Prince, in Canterbury Cathedral, of gilded bronze and with his helm, shield, spurs and cote-armour hanging above it, was a befittingly ornate tomb for the doyen of 14th-century chivalry. (Corbis)



bodies sometimes being preserved for the journey. Occasionally the heart and other organs would be removed first. This helped with preservation; when Bertrand du Guesclin died in the summer of 1380 his body was embalmed, then, when it was perceived (or perhaps smelt) that the embalming had not been adequate, flensed, the flesh boiled from the bones. At each point on the journey his entrails and then his flesh were interred in a local church. His bones were carried to join the royal tombs at St Denis and his heart to Brittany, his home. Certainly for the royalty and the highest nobility there was a fashion for burial in more than one church. Richard the Lionheart's brain was buried in Poitou, his heart in Rouen and the body near to his father in Anjou. In part this reflected the favourite places of the deceased and those that were very much a part of his life when alive, but it also ensured that a larger number of Masses were said for his soul, reducing his time in Purgatory, and was a means of spreading the donations that went with the burials amongst a greater number of churches.

The burial of a knight was his last opportunity for him to display his status, worth and prowess, and they were often dramatic affairs, loaded with symbolism. The wills of knights could contain highly detailed instructions for their funerals. The Black Prince instructed that:

> ... at that hour our body shall be brought into the town of Canterbury as far as the priory, that two coursers covered with our arms and in our helmets shall go before our said body; that is to say, the one for war with our arms quartered, and the other for peace with our badges of ostrich feathers, with four banners of the same; and every one of these who bear said banners shall have a chapeau of our arms; and that he who shall be armed for war, shall have a man armed bearing after him a black pennon with ostrich feathers.

Lesser knights might not be able to afford anything quite so grand, but they could still aspire to similar displays. The knight Sir Brian Stapleton instructed that there be 'a man armed with my arms, with my helm on his head, and that he be well mounted and a man of good looks of whatever condition he is...' The idea that the knight should take his final journey arrayed as a warrior with all of the trappings of his calling and displaying the heraldic achievement that identified him and his kin was very powerful.

The knight's tomb reflected this martial status even after the knight was long buried. In effigy or brass the knight could have himself depicted as a knight in armour and above his head might be suspended his helmet and his shield, as with the Black Prince. Whilst the effigies have survived in large numbers, although often without the paintwork necessary to identify them, and deeply incised with the graffiti of centuries, the survival of a number of great helms sporting holes drilled for brackets suggests that there would have been very many more helmets hanging over tombs in parish churches across Western Europe.

It is often argued that war for the medieval knight was a game in which he risked his fortune and his harness and little else. Encased in steel and facing an opponent who sought his capture rather than his death, the knight was unlikely to be killed.

This was not the case. As we have seen, the weapons that the knight wielded were carefully designed not just to incapacitate or wound but to kill, and kill efficiently. Even the finest armour could not stop every blow and death was an ever-present risk. It was one which the ethos by which the knight conducted himself – chivalry – taught him to accept. As we shall see, it also emphasized, alongside restraint and mercy for one's fellow knights, a love and desire for violence and bloodshed. Chivalry was, after all, a warrior's code.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHIVALRY: THE KNIGHTLY CODE

THE MODERN USE OF THE WORD CHIVALRY IS A PALE REFLECTION of what the term once meant. Today it is used to give a sense of fair play, politeness towards women, a genteel old-fashioned quality. In the middle ages and in its broadest use it meant the body of knights themselves, and anything concerning them and their role in society. More precisely, it was a complex and seemingly contradictory code of behaviour to which the knight adhered, and the criteria by which they measured themselves. Although principally militaristic, chivalry presented ideals of behaviour both on and off the battlefield, and became an ideology that was to encompass all aspects of its adherents' lives.

As with all ideologies, getting a firm understanding of chivalry as an outsider at nearly a millennium's remove can be difficult. This is particularly true of its early years. Chivalry was not codified until the 14th century, and even then books on chivalry, such as those of Geoffrey de Charny, Honoré Bonet or Christine de Pisan, are not expositions of the concept but seek to answer specific questions of practice and behaviour. The chronicles and narrative histories can prove instructive in that the actions they praise and the behaviour they criticize can be equated to chivalric (or non-chivalric) behaviour. However, the ecclesiastical background of the majority of chroniclers means that their idea of what is praiseworthy need not coincide with what the knight considered so. The fictional sources are generally considered to offer the greatest insight into the chivalric thought-world. The epic and romance literature, as we shall see, both led and reflected the chivalric culture of which they were a part. Still, they also offer a distorted vision, warped by fantastical exaggerations and the drive to tell a captivating story. However, chivalry is so pervasive, so much a part of the world of the knight, that we have a huge amount of material from which to build our picture.

THE ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES OF CHIVALRY

There were three distinct influences on the development of chivalry, each bringing in a different set of values. The first strand was what might be called the warrior ethic.

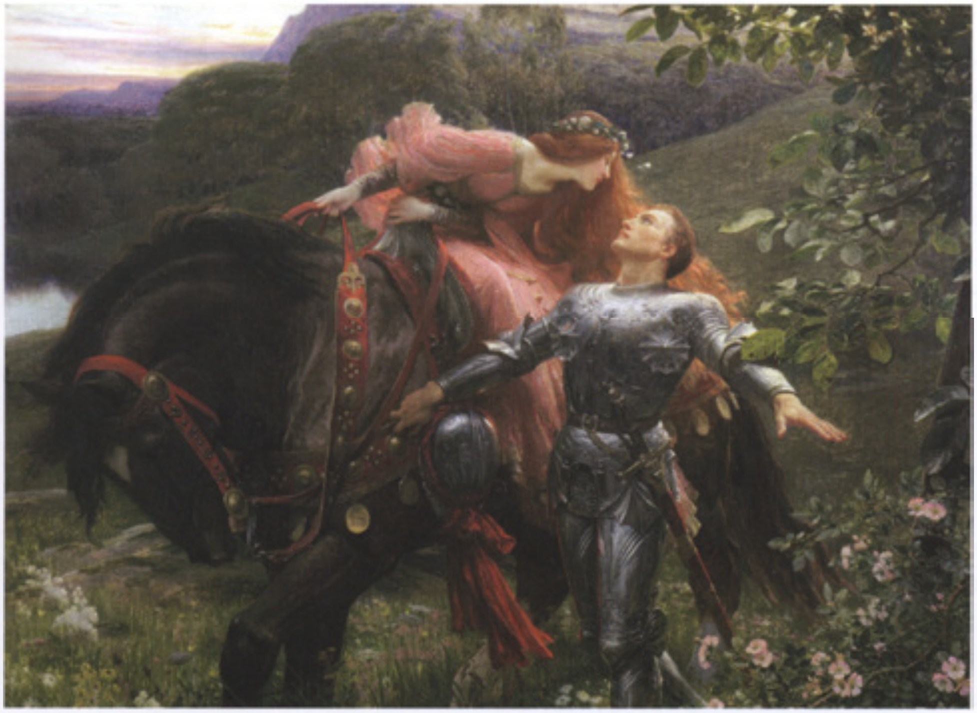
This emphasized bravery in battle, as well as physical strength and martial prowess, in particular skill on horseback and in the use of the lance and sword. This focus on personal strength and prowess is at the heart of the earlier tenth- and 11th-century tales such as the *Song of Roland* or the William of Orange cycle.

In these tales it is the hero's individual exploits on the battlefield that loom largest: terrific fights against overwhelming odds, superhuman blows landed and terrible wounds suffered and survived. Roland slays the Moorish warrior Grandonie by splitting his helmet with a blow that carries on through his head, hauberk, body and saddlebows, finishing deep in his horse's back. His companion Oliver continues to deal killing blows even after he himself has been struck a mortal blow.

Although largely a factual biography the *History of William Marshal* follows a similar vein. It is William's prowess at the tournament and on the battlefield, along with his sage tactical advice, which his biographer highlights most greatly. William is *prud'homme*, a man of prowess and status.

Geoffrey de Charny writes:

> ... if you desire that your arms be remembered, recognized and adorned above others, seek constantly and diligently to perform deeds of arms. And when God grants you the good fortune to find them, do your duty wisely and boldly, fearing nothing except



The pre-Raphaelite image of the knight and his lady is the embodiment of medieval chivalry for many. But this romantic image was far from the reality of an ideology which praised prowess and violence as much as it did piety and love. (Bridgeman Art Library)

> shame, striving with the skill of your hand and the effort of your body to as great a degree as your powers can extend in order to inflict damage on your opponents, always being among the first in battle. By so doing you will receive greater recognition for your achievements from your friends and enemies...

As the reputation of the knight depended upon his martial virtues being acknowledged by his peers, there was a need for those deeds to be witnessed and an emphasis on the performing of individual feats, such as being first to engage the enemy in battle. Such deeds were recorded in the chronicles and narratives, which are full of the names of knights who appear only once and only because of a noteworthy act of prowess. For example, we are told of Robert, the son of Gerard of Buonalbergo, serving as Bohemond of Taranto's standard-bearer during the First Crusade, and how he carried his lord's banner right in amongst the Saracens, making its tails float in their faces and 'with a tremendous shout momentarily checked them'.

There was also a sense that fights should be a fair contest of arms, and that the chivalric warrior should not use underhand means to win. This was true in tournament, where we find rules against bracing lances against the saddle bow, or having gauntlets whose fingers locked closed around a weapon, but was also true in battle. This is most clearly reflected in the romances. When a party of three knights ambushes Erec and Enide in the tale of the same name, they attack the hero one at a time because, Chrétien tells us, 'at that time it was customary that two knights should not join in an attack against one, and if the others had attacked their adversary it would have been considered treachery'. The same was true in real life, as shown by William Marshal's sparing of the future Richard the Lionheart's life outside of Le Mans, described earlier. Not that this meant that *ruses de guerre* and feints could not be used. As we have seen, ambushes and the like were legitimage tactics and an acceptable part of knightly behaviour.

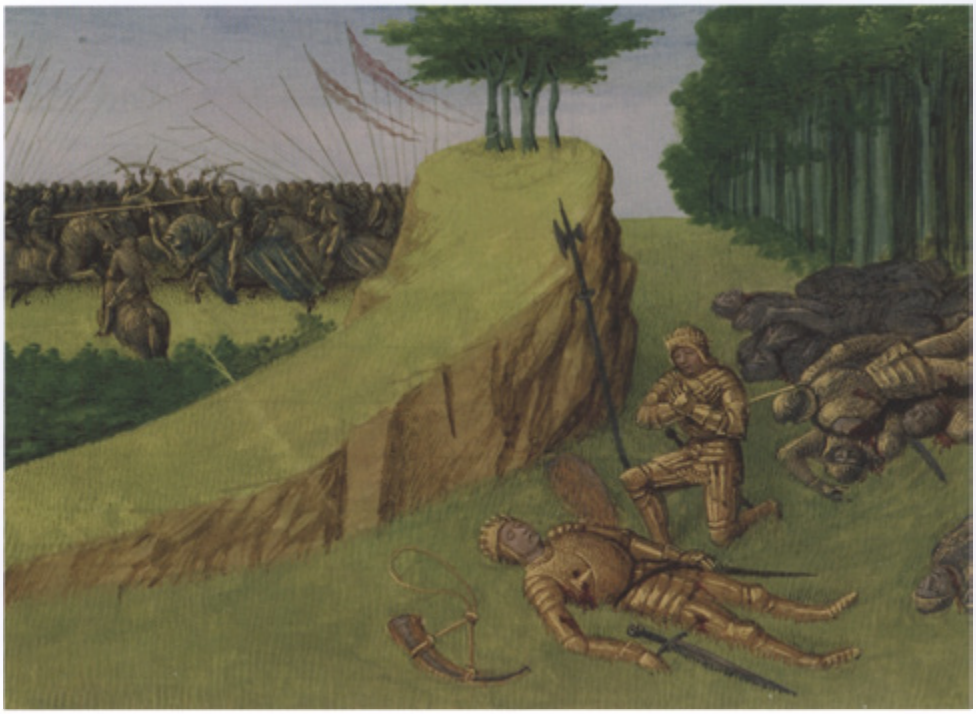
A third element to this particular aspect was an emphasis on loyalty to one's comrades and one's lord. Jean du Bueil, the writer of the 15th-century semi-autobiographical work *Le Jouvencal*, says that:

> It is a joyous thing, a war ... you love your comrade so much in war. When you see that your quarrel is just, and your blood is fighting well, tears rise to your eyes. A great sweet feeling of loyalty and of pity fills your heart on seeing your friend so valiantly exposing his body to execute and accomplish the command of our Creator. And then you are prepared to go and die or live with him, and for love not to abandon him. And out of that, there arises such a delectation, that he who has not experienced it is not fit to say what delight it is.

It is the relationship between the knight and his lord that acts as the catalyst for the epic tales. Roland's death was brought about by the treachery of his uncle Ganelon, whom Charlemagne had pulled apart by horses for the deed. Roland's companion Oliver stayed beside his friend to the death. According to Geoffrey de Villehardouin, Louis de Béthune refused to leave the field in spite of his wounds, with the words 'God forbid that I should ever be reproached with flying from the field and abandoning my emperor.' A most poignant example of loyalty to one's lord occurred at Crécy. King John of Bohemia, allied to the King of France, served with him at the battle. Although he had lost his sight some ten years earlier he insisted on taking the field and had his retinue lead him into the thick of the battle that he might strike a blow with his sword. In order that they would not be separated from him in the press his 12 companions tied all of their reins together. During the battle all were slain, and Froissart tells us that 'the next day they were found in the place about the king, and all their horses tied each to other'.

Loyalty and duty was a two-way thing. Just as the knight had a duty to serve his lord, so his lord had a duty to defend and support his knights both on the field and in general. A lord was expected to be generous to his followers, rewarding their loyalty with gifts. A lord's failure to protect or provide for his knights was as great a cause of shame as a vassal failing his lord. In the 12th-century epic tales *Raoul de Cambrai* and *Girart of Vienne*, a perception of failure led to resistance, rebellion, war and suffering. In *Raoul* it was King Louis' deprivation of the eponymous anti-hero's rightful inheritance and his subsequent failure to grant him a promised fief, that forced Raoul to undertake armed rebellion. In *Girart of Vienne* it was Charlemagne's refusal to punish his queen for shaming his man Girart in front of the court that breached the ties between vassal and lord and triggered the seven-year siege of Vienne. It was not just in the romances that such splits took place. Before the battle of Evesham both sides pronounced the *diffidatio*, the formal renunciation of the tie of lord and vassal.

The warrior ethos can be seen in the earliest chivalric writings and behaviour, and formed a central core around which other strands developed. The origins of these martial values tend to be ascribed to the warrior culture of the Germanic tribes who settled in Western Europe at the collapse of the Roman Empire, and it is true that these same virtues are lauded in the surviving literature of Saxon England, Viking Scandinavia and Carolingian France. The *Song of Maldon*, a poem describing the battle between the tenth-century Ealdorman of Essex Brihtnoth and a Viking army, describes the lord as a 'giver of rings' and 'the people's chief, Aetheldred's earl'. It ends with Brihtnoth's death, after which his warriors, fighting to the death, 'all desired one of two things, to lose their lives or to avenge the one they loved'. *Beowulf*, of a similar date and origin, has similar themes of prowess, loyalty and service. These similarities



The *Song of Roland* is the earliest of the chivalric tales, a heroic epic recast in the 11th century as a tale of Christian knighthood. (Bridgeman Art Library)

do not mean that the former is a direct descendant of the latter. Instead they share common notions of military virtues which are also to be found in classical Greece and Rome, and indeed in almost all warrior cultures. What distinguishes chivalry are its other influences.

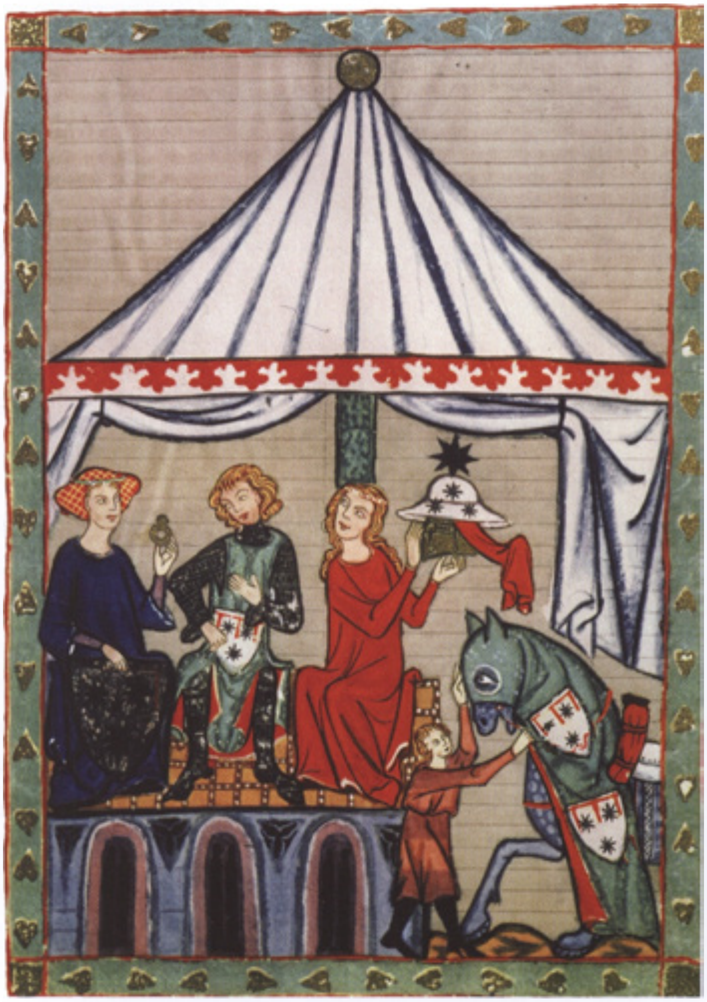
The second layer of values derived from the social position of the chivalric class. As we have seen, in the early part of the 11th century the knight was of relatively low status and the focus of the nascent chivalric literature was on the concepts of duty and service. During the latter half of the 11th and into the 12th century nobility and knighthood became increasingly synonymous and the knight became as much a land-holding social elite as a martial one. Virtues connected with lordship, in particular largesse and justice, already central elements of aristocratic culture, were added to the chivalric ethos. During the latter half of the 12th century a further group of social values appeared. The romance literature circulating the noble courts of central and southern France shifted emphasis from the martial prowess of the knight in battle towards his behaviour in the noble and royal court, typified by the Arthurian tales of the 12th-century author Chrétien de Troyes and the *Roman de la Rose*. Here less warlike accomplishments such as dancing, poetry and music were brought to the fore, as well as the virtues of *courtoisie*, or courtly culture: temperate and witty speech, honour towards women and their pursuit in *fin amors*, or courtly love.

Women appeared in the stories, not just as the doting, proud or mourning mothers of the epics, but as wives to be won, queens to be venerated and obeyed, and individuals of wit, intelligence and cunning. How far this was reflected in the status and position of women in medieval society is a hotly debated topic, but the idea was most definitely an important one.

The *Minnesänger* of Germany are a fine example of the importance of courtly love to the chivalric ideal. Many of these poets were knights, both active warriors and pursuers of *fin amors*, courtly love. They were poets, writing *Minnesang*, songs and lyrics on the theme of courtly love, but also about the political events of their day. The Swabian *Minnesänger* Hartmann von Aue wrote a number of versions of the Arthurian myths, as did many of his contemporaries, whilst another, Neidhart von Reuental, wrote poems insulting his enemies. Similarly talented knights were to be found throughout Europe especially, if unsurprisingly, in the Languedoc region of southern France, the cradle of *fin amors*.

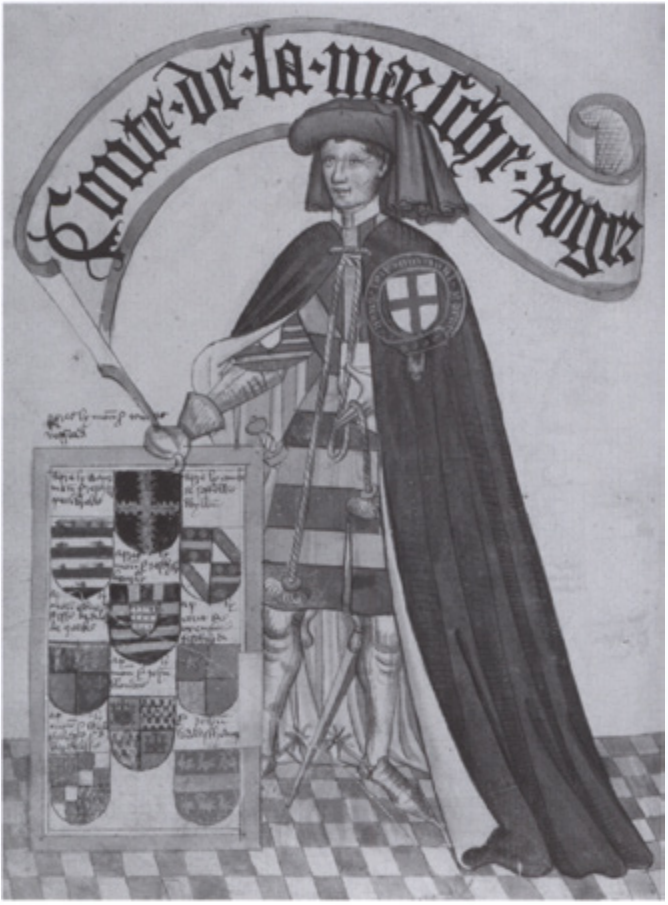
Throughout the 12th and early 13th centuries knights became more and more aware of themselves as a distinctive order of society. As this coalesced new tenets were added to the chivalric ethos which emphasized it. The warriors who had been inclusive and comradely now became exclusive and regarded themselves as an increasingly closed elite. Within that group, however, the idea of comradeship in arms was retained. The 12th-century chronicle the *Historia Galfridi* records Count Geoffrey of Anjou as saying 'Are we not knights, should we not therefore owe a special compassion for knights?' It became increasingly normal for knights to show mercy to a defeated opponent, seeking to capture rather than to kill each other. Describing the battle of Brémule fought between the King of France and the Duke of Normandy in 1119, the chronicler Orderic Vitalis says that only three out of some 800 knightly combatants were killed because they spared each other out of a sense of 'fellowship in arms'.

The knights' sense of their exclusivity continued to grow. Tournament seems to have



A knight receives a token from his lady. In courtly love it was the attention of ladies that spurred the warrior on to do great deeds at the tournament and on the battlefield, and those great deeds that drew the attention of ladies worthy of the knight's devotion. (The Art Archive) been an early tool that knights used to mark themselves out as a separate order within society. The cost of attending these events and the social events that went with them limited attendance to a select few. From the 13th century, regulations limited the numbers of footsoldiers and servants a knight might bring to tournament, and restricted their access to the tourney field. In part this was to stop some of the unruly behaviour that broke out, but it was also a way of limiting access to the tournament to the knightly class alone. By the end of that century lists were being drawn up by heralds recording the pedigrees of those taking part and in Germany in the following century some tournaments were being restricted to only those who could prove aristocratic descent over four generations.

Another means by which the knightly class segregated itself was the 14th-century development of secular orders of chivalry and the very similar confraternities of knights. The earliest of these seems to be the Order of the Band, formed by Alfonso XI of Castile around 1330. The next, and most famous, was the Order of the Garter, created by Edward III in 1348, but many more were established in the 14th and 15th centuries. These were born out of the earlier tourneying societies, groups of knights sharing a desire to achieve feats of arms in the lists and banding together to achieve them, and the lay confraternities, pious and charitable organizations similar to the craft guilds which became popular around the same time. Members of secular orders had clear duties to support their fellow members, swearing loyalty and friendship to each other. The Order undertook to organize the saying of Masses for deceased comrades and to protect the honour and name of members in the public sphere. They were to aid each other in battle, help financially with ransoms and in case of injury, and mediate in conflict between members. There could also be a political motivation. Edward's Order of the Garter seems to have been connected with increasing enthusiasm for his wars against the French by encouraging the chivalric ethos amongst his own magnates and knights, and by offering membership to lords and nobles of Europe as a diplomatic manoeuvre. The orders



Roger Mortimer, one of the founder knights of the Order of the Garter, depicted in 1440–50. He wears the Order's mantle over his armour and rests his hand on a tablet depicting the arms of each of the knights who was to take his stall in St George's chapel, Windsor. (© British Library) were elite societies: only the nobility were permitted, although they emphasized the sense of brotherhood amongst members that levelled the distinctions between greater and lesser knights. They were also militant; their members were expected to be active in war and tournament, and many of the orders had badges that were to be augmented in recognition of deeds performed on the battlefield, or had tables of honour at their meetings where those who achieved the greatest feats were to take their place.

The ethos of the secular orders was steeped in romance literature. The Order of the Garter drew heavily on the Arthurian myths. Edward instituted the Order's great feast to be held at Windsor which, legend had it, had been originally built by Arthur himself. The Order of the Golden Fleece, the *Toison d'Or*, created by Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy in 1430, drew inspiration from the classical tale of Jason and the Argonauts, mixed with the biblical story of Gideon's fleece.

The idea of *courtoisie* found its way into warfare and campaign. During the siege of the Norman town of Le Mans by Helias, Count of Maine in 1100 the two sides daily exchanged jokes and insults and the count had safe passage into the citadel where he was able to spend time in conversation with the defenders, assured of his safety because of the garrison's good faith and honour. When the castle was given permission to surrender, the garrison were able to march out with their arms and were received not as prisoners but as 'faithful friends'. When the knight William de Grandcourt captured the rebel count Amaury de Montfort at Bourgthéroulde in 1124, during the war between Henry II and his nephew William Clito, de Grandcourt chose to 'desert the king, abandon his own lands and go into exile rather than condemn the noble count to perpetual prison', Amaury's inevitable fate if de Grandcourt had handed him over to Henry as he ought to have done. After the battle of Poitiers the Black Prince displayed his *largesse* by providing dinner for his prisoners, and serving King Jean of France himself.

The final major influence on the development of chivalry was the Church. The two ideologies did not fit easily with each other. Christianity's origins were pacifist. The writings of the earliest Christian theologians had all argued that war and violence were incompatible with following Christ. However the adoption of the Christian religion by the Roman emperors, first by Constantine around 317, and its eventual establishment as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Theodosius II in the fifth century, forced a rethink on the matter. Fortunately, whilst the New Testament was predominantly pacifist, there were passages in which the soldier was accepted rather than condemned, and the Old Testament held the image of God as the Lord of Hosts, a bringer of military victory to the faithful.

The writings of the fourth-century theologian Saint Augustine of Hippo on the matter, as on so much else in early Christian doctrine, had a huge impact upon the

PRIESTS AT WAR AND BATTLING BISHOPS

When the theologians Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas set out the terms by which war was acceptable to the Church they set clear restrictions on who was able to participate. Clerics, who by their vocation were sacred, were forbidden to spill blood, as were members of monastic orders, whose communities prefigured the Kingdom of Heaven and who should abstain from war as they abstained from possessions or marriage.

This did not preclude the involvement of the clergy in warfare altogether, however. Priests routinely accompanied armies, in part to serve the normal daily spiritual needs of the warriors. Confession, penance and the Mass took on an extra significance in the face of battle. As battle was engaged those priests would gather and pray for victory, as well as being there to tend the wounded and offer the last rites. As previously mentioned, at the battle of Northallerton, also known as the Battle of the Standard for the saint's banners that the Anglo-Norman forces carried with them, the priests, including Bishop Ralph of the Orkneys, stood on a hill above the battle, praying for God's intercession against the Scots.

Priests might also take a more active role. The communal militias that the Church encouraged for the enforcement of the Peace and Truce of God were often led by parish priests who, as men of local standing and the representatives of the Church, were obvious choices for command. Senior churchmen combined the role of secular and ecclesiastical lord. In the Holy Roman Empire (an elected monarchy spanning almost all of modern Germany and Austria and parts of Belgium and Holland) the prince-bishops fused both secular and ecclesiastical power in one body. The Bishop of Durham had similar powers within his diocese which, given its proximity to the Scottish border, was a major military zone. It was inevitable that he

later medieval conceptions of the limits of war. He recognized that peace was impossible on earth and that it was necessary to make a place for war within Christianity. To his thinking wars were acceptable if they were 'just'. 'Just war', according to Augustine, was primarily the fight for justice and the tranquillity of order. War to right wrongs and recover goods was 'just', even if one was the aggressor. However 'just war' should be declared and waged on the authority of a prince. He alone held the responsibility for taking up arms. If he declared a war that was not just then the sin was his, his soldiers were rendered innocent by their duty to obey their lord. Augustine also instructed that those with a religious calling should not participate in war. Their sacred nature prohibited monks and clerics from spilling blood.

Augustine believed that '*justa bella ulciscuntur injurias*', that is that 'just wars avenge injuries'. The prince who waged a 'just war' acted as the instrument of God's should find himself commanding troops from time to time.

There was no suggestion that such men should take up weapons themselves, nor that they should fight. They were still bound by the injunctions of their calling and restricted to a role of leadership only. This did not stop all of them from playing an active part. Joinville records the actions of Jean de Voysey, one of his priests. Some of the enemy had built a redoubt from which they were shooting arrows into the crusader encampment. As darkness fell the priest,wearing only an aketon and a steel cap, and trailing a spear, approached the Saracens and, getting close, he suddenly charged them, causing them to flee and allowing the stone entrenchment to be taken down. 'From that time onward,' Joinville writes, 'my priest was very well known throughout the army, and one man or another would point him out and say "Look, that's my Lord of Joinville's priest, who got the better of eight Saracens."'

Philippe of Dreux, the Bishop of Beauvais, had a distinctively long and active military career. He went to the Holy Land in 1180, after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin, and in the Third Crusade of 1189, where his support for his king, Philippe Augustus of France, made him an enemy of Richard 'the Lionheart' of England. In 1197 Richard's troops took the bishop captive during their assault on the castle of Milli. The king held him for over a year, refusing to set him free despite the protests of the Pope's legate Peter of Capuano that as a churchman he should be released. Richard argued that Philippe had not been 'captured as a bishop but as a worthy knight, fully armed and with his helm laced' and therefore could not be treated as a member of the clergy. The bishop went on to fight in the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathar heretics in southern France. He was serving the French king again in 1214 at Bouvines where, although 63 years old, he captured knights, including the English Earl of Salisbury, William Longespée, by unhorsing them with a mace before having some of his *familia* carry them away claiming the capture in order that he was not seen to have breached his vocation.

Philippe of Dreux typifies a certain type of medieval churchman. Born of noble families and sharing the society and culture of the knightly class, it was inevitable that when the opportunity arose some should respond to these influences and cast away the mitre and crozier in favour of the helm and sword.

punishment. The justice of war also rested upon the disposition of the spirit and the motivation of the conscience. Thus war should respect the Church, avoid needless violence and atrocities, and show honour to one's enemy, as cruelty was a sign that war was waged for the love of violence rather than of justice; 'The desire to harm, cruelty in vengeance, an implacable spirit, unquenched ferocity in revolt, the desire to dominate and other similar attitudes, if there are any, that is what the law condemns in warfare.'

The mixed feelings of the Church towards war are indicated by the penitentials: texts which laid out the penances due for sins. These recognized the rightness of killing in legitimate warfare, but still allocated penances for the shedding of blood, indicating a period away from the Church and the sacraments, fasting and then reconciliation with the Church in humility. The distinctions could be sophisticated. Four years after

Hastings a set of penances was imposed by a Church council, even though the war was fought against a perjurer and carried out under a Papal banner. These said that any who killed a man should do one year's penance; if the perpetrator was ignorant of the fate of a man he had wounded, then 40 days; if he was not sure how many he had killed, one day a week for the rest of his life. As for archers who ran the risk of not knowing the losses they had inflicted, they had to do 40 days' penance three times.

The Church's attitude to war continued to evolve, finding new ways to attempt to limit it. Between 975 and 1025 we see the promulgation of a movement commonly called the Peace of God or *Pax Dei*. This was developed in three major Church councils; at Le Puy in 975, Charroux in 989 and Verdun-sur-le-Doubs in 1016. At first these movements sought to obtain oaths from knights to respect the property and person of the Church and peasants (although they included caveats that allowed attacks on the property of peasants on land owned by knights, or to punish criminal acts). In 1038 Aimon, Archbishop of Bourges, went a step further by organizing Peace Leagues, obliging all the faithful aged 15 years and over to declare themselves enemies of disturbers of the peace and to promise to take up arms against them if required. Such peace militia were actively encouraged by the French Capetian monarchs of the 11th and early 12th centuries because they encouraged the population to look to their own defence rather than relying on their sovereign who, at this time at least, was not in a position to protect them. As a counter to the depredations of robber barons and the internecine warfare that was rife within the region, they were vital in helping the Capetians in their struggle to reassert their sovereign powers over the over-mighty baronage.

In essence the Peace of God movement was an attempt to counter brigandage and the depredations of unscrupulous *milites*. It placed goods and particular individuals such as clerics, merchants, pilgrims, peasants, noble women and their escorts in the absence of their husbands, widows and nuns under specific protection. It was about restricting feuds and unlawful war rather than the 'just war' under authority of a prince.

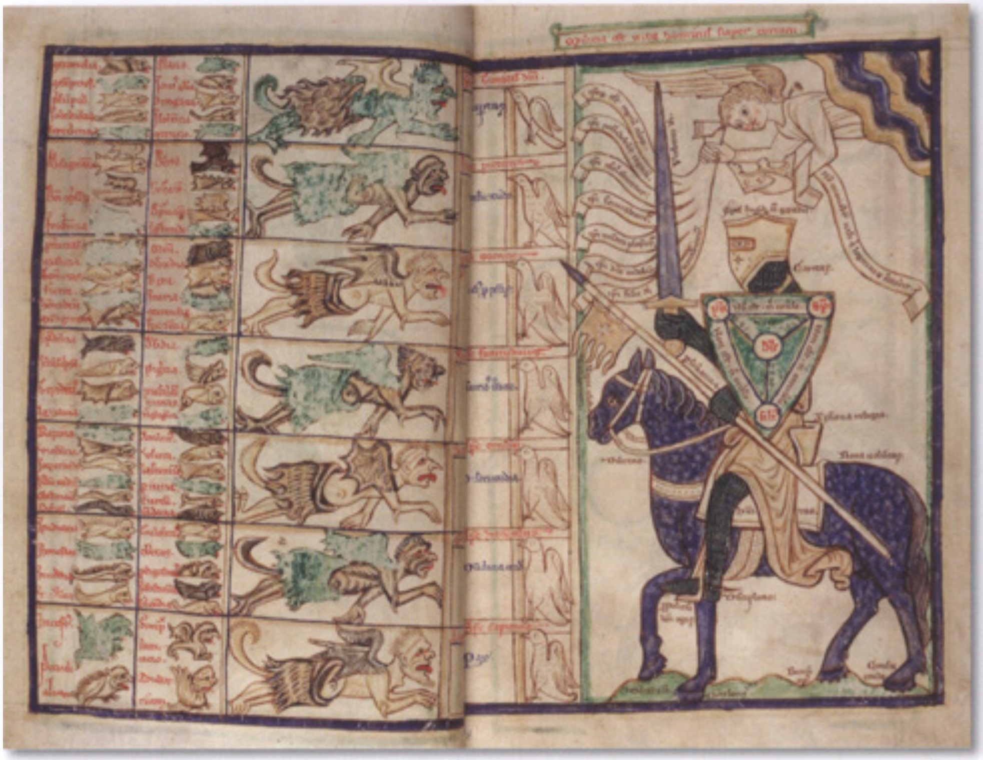
The Truce of God (*Treuga Dei*) came later, but stemmed from the same motives. After the Council of Toulonges in 1027 a ban was placed over the county of Roussillon in France on violence between 9pm on Saturday and Prime (around 6am) on Monday. In 1041 the bishops of Provence instigated their own truce, running from Vespers (sunset) on Wednesday until Matins (dawn) on Monday. A few years later the Truce had spread to Aquitaine, Burgundy, Normandy, Vienne and Besançon. Pope Urban II spread it to all of Christendom, adding other periods of abstention; Advent, Christmastide, Lent, Eastertide, between Rogationtide (from the fifth Sunday after Easter) and the Octave of Pentecost (50 days after Easter), the three feasts of the Virgin and several saints' days.

Where the Church could not stop war within Europe it sought to redirect it elsewhere. Part of the rationale behind the preaching of the First Crusade was to redirect the violent energies of the warrior class away from internecine warfare and unite them against a common enemy more suited to the Church's views on warfare. The crusade continued to be used by the Church in this way throughout the medieval period. In the 14th century the Church attempted to address the problem of the Great Companies and *routiers* that were ravaging France by offering to engage them for crusades in the east. The companies of both Sir John Hawkwood, the great *condottiere* captain, and the French freelance Bertrand du Guesclin made noises about going on crusade, although in the end neither did.

The medieval Church, then, recognized that it could not eliminate war, but that it could attempt to regulate and direct the warriors' behaviour. It recognized the knights as one of the three divinely ordained *ordines*, or orders, of society. The *pugnatores*, 'those who fight', ranked alongside the *oratores*, 'those who pray', and the *laboratores*, 'those who work', in a mutually supportive model of society. The Church adopted the knight and his equipment as metaphors for the Christian's struggle against evil. Here it was building on passages from the Old Testament, using Isaiah 59:17 and Ephesians 6:10–17, which refer to the donning of the armour of God, but extended the metaphor considerably.

Its writers also appealed directly to the knights themselves. They cajoled and threatened with damnation, warning of the dire consequences of the pomp, vanity and violence of the knightly life. Orderic Vitalis tells the tale of the *mesnie Hellequin*. A monk named Walchelin was returning to his home late one January night when he heard the commotion of a band of horsemen approaching. Four troops of ghosts passed him by: a group of commoners, then women riding side-saddle, the third a party of priests and monks and, finally, an army of knights, all black save for flickering flames. The monk tried to grab one of the horses, seeking proof of what he had witnessed, but he was attacked and beaten off. One of the knights was the monk's dead brother. He describes his torments, saying 'I have endured severe punishments for the great sins with which I am heavily burdened. The arms which we bear are red hot, and offend us with an appalling stench, weighing us down with intolerable weight, and burning with everlasting fire.' He went on to explain how his spurs were wreathed with fire, 'because I used bright sharp spurs in my eager haste to shed blood'. He finally warned his brother of the damnation that would pursue him too, but also explains that because of the monk's vocation and prayers their father had been spared the same torment and his own suffering had been eased.

The leading 12th-century ecclesiastic Bernard of Clairvaux demanded of the secular knight:

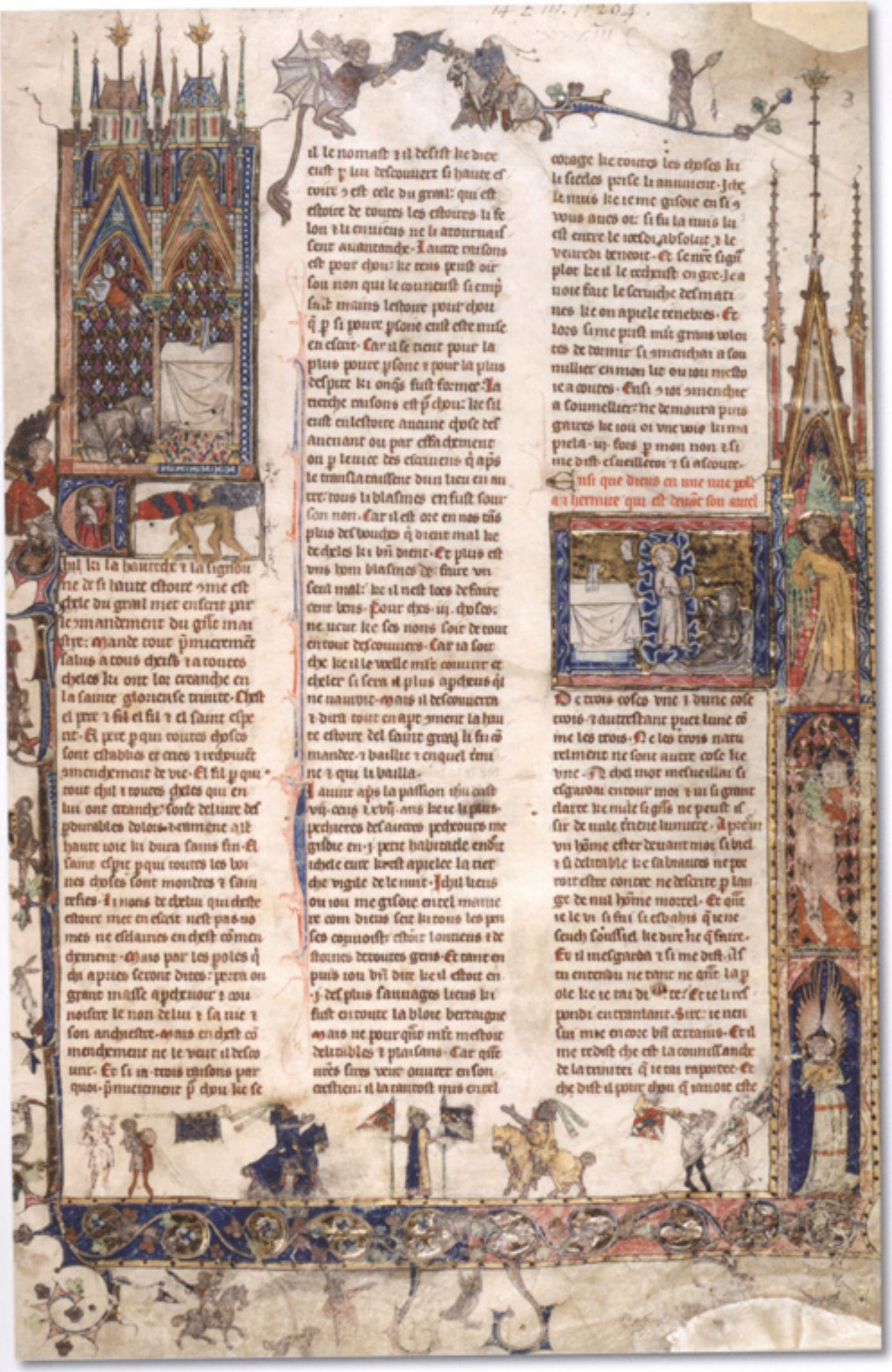


In a treaty on virtue and vice, *Summa de vitiis*, Peraldus chose to depict a knight armoured with the virtues and strengths of a good Christian and bearing a shield depicting the Trinity. (© British Library)

> What … is this monstrous error and what this unbearable urge which bids you fight with such pomp and labour… You cover your horses with silk, and plume your armour with I know not what sort of rags; you paint your shields and your saddles; you adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones, and then in all this glory you rush to your ruin with fearful wrath and fearless folly.

Stories of pious knights were used to encourage piety. One popular tale described how a knight on his way to tournament stopped off to hear Mass. It took so long that he missed the event, arriving only to find that the Virgin Mary had taken on his appearance, and had fought and won the honours of the tournament for him.

The knightly class embraced this militarized Christianity, the secular literature absorbing and reflecting the Church's writings. They could see their actions as approved by God: after all did the Church not recognize their calling to war and bloodshed as part of the God-given structure of society? From this they could come to believe that just as the *oratores* came closer to God through prayer, and the *laboratores* through work, so too they came closer to God by engaging in battle. The struggle, pain and suffering they experienced on campaign was equated to that of Christ's Passion. As we have seen, *Le Jouvencal* talks of the knight's comrade 'valiantly



The Holy Grail was to become the ultimate prize sought after by the knights of high medieval romance. After Chrétien de Troyes introduced it in his late 12th-century tale of Perceval ever-more complex and symbolic tales were told about the search for it. In this image Christ is seen giving the book of the Holy Grail to a hermit. (© British Library) exposing his body to execute and accomplish the command of our Creator', and Geoffrey de Charny writes that whilst the monastic life imposed hardships and sacrifices they could not compare to those of the knightly order: 'there is no religious order in which as much is suffered as has to be endured by these good knights who go in search of deeds of arms in the right way'.

The romances also picked up on this theme. The questing knight began to seek not great deeds or his lady love, but deeper spiritual answers; an idea most strongly embodied in the tale of the knight Perceval. In Chrétien's 12th-century original the Holy Grail – the cup supposedly used by Christ and the Apostles at the Last Supper – appears as a side story to a fairly standard romance tale of prowess and love. It appears during the feast held at the mysterious castle of the Fisher King, carried as part of a procession. Here it is its contents, a consecrated Host, which is important to the story. In Wolfram von Esschenbach's 13th-century retelling, however, Perceval's attempt to rediscover the Grail, and thereby his closeness to God, is a key theme. By the 14th century the Grail has become the subject of a tale in its own right, and all of Arthur's knights become part of the quest for its rediscovery.

CRUSADING AND THE MILITARY ORDERS

A key aspect of the relationship between Church and knighthood was the crusading movement. Pope Urban II's preaching of the First Crusade in 1095 seems to have captured the imagination of Europe's knights; it saw them join in huge numbers, and whilst not all of them joined in order to free the holy places from the control of Muslims or to support their Orthodox brethren in the East – the stated aims of the expedition – it is clear that the concept of fighting a war for Christ was an important one. It was not a wholly novel concept. The Carolingian dynasty had fought major wars against the Muslims of Moorish Spain and the pagan Saxons, and the Pope and the Carolingian bishops were active and enthusiastic supporters of those campaigns. The epics written about them, *The Song of Roland* especially, have all the same elements and already make the point that war against the heathen was to be considered most glorious. What the crusade ideology did was formalize and build on these concepts. The forces were not those of a particular nation or kingdom, they became the army of the God and his Church. Their participation was no longer just meritorious: the crusader received absolution, remission of his sins. The impact of the crusades on chivalry was to add to the coalescing concept of the spiritual knight, the warrior for

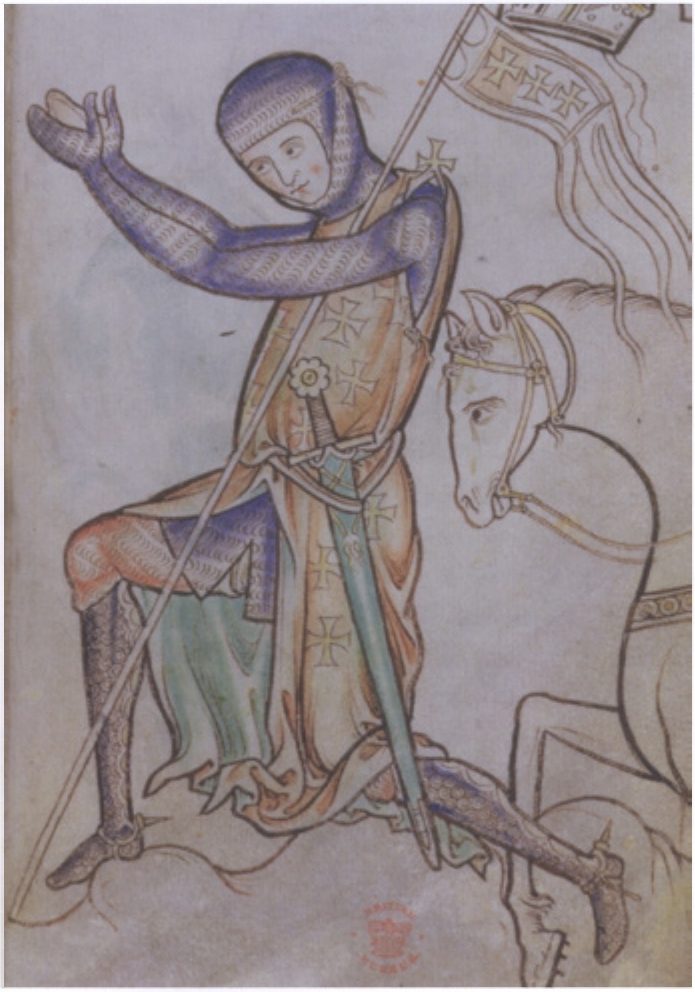
Christ. It gave the knight the opportunity to prove his prowess, to suffer the hardships of his calling in the service and with the blessing of God. Geoffrey de Charny could write that:

> ... the man who makes war against the enemies of religion in order to support and maintain Christianity and the worship of Our Lord is engaged in a war which is righteous, holy, certain, and sure, for his earthly body will be honoured in a saintly fashion and his soul will, in a short space of time, be borne in holiness and without pain into paradise.

Perhaps the most extreme way in which the knightly class sought to combine piety and the service of God with their calling as warriors was the development of the military orders. After the First Crusade a group of nine knights approached the Patriarch of Jerusalem offering their services to protect pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem. They were successful and their numbers grew. They then approached the Church in Europe seeking its support for their endeavours. At the Council of Troyes in 1128 they accepted a variation on the monastic rule of the Cistercian monks, becoming a unique combination of monk and knight. Their success owed much to the theologian Bernard of Clairvaux, who explained their existence and role to the world in his *In Praise of New Knighthood*. Members of the Order of the Knights Templar were held up as paragons of the knightly virtue, and a lesson to the secular knights who squandered their lives and souls in sinful pride and violence.

The Templars spawned a range of military orders of similar forms including, most famously, the Order of St John (the Knights Hospitaller), who had originally formed to run the hospital of St John in Jerusalem, and the Teutonic Order. As their name suggests this Order comprised German knights. Whilst active in the Holy Land, they were also given the privileges over the conquest and possession of pagan Prussia. So successful was the Order that with their absorption of the Order of the Sword Brethren and the purchase of Estonia from Denmark they became a sovereign power in their own right. Likewise, the Hospitallers, after the fall of the Latin kingdoms, established themselves on the islands of Rhodes and then Malta.

The Templars were equally successful in a different secular enterprise. Houses were established in Europe in order to collect recruits and, more importantly, revenue, which was then transferred to the front line, as it were, in the Holy Land. The administrative network necessary to achieve this became highly efficient, and secular lords began to use them to store and transfer money. Effectively the Order became an international bank, holding and loaning money to many of the major European princes. Indeed their success in this role was a major cause of their downfall. One of



Philippe the Fair of France's motivations for getting the Order dissolved in 1307, ostensibly for acts of heresy, was the fact that he could seize the Order's property and wealth within his kingdom.

Although the military orders were a powerful and influential group, their importance can be overstated. The number of active fighting brothers was never very great. The Templars probably never numbered more than 2,000 knight-brothers, whilst the entire force defending the Hospitallers' island of Rhodes against Suleiman the Magnificent in 1522 was around 7,000. The army of the Teutonic Order that was defeated by the army of the Russian principality of Novgorod under Alexander Nevsky at Lake Peipus in 1242 was around 4,000 strong. In both these latter cases this number includes sergeant-brothers and secular allies, crusaders and mercenaries.

BECOMING A KNIGHT

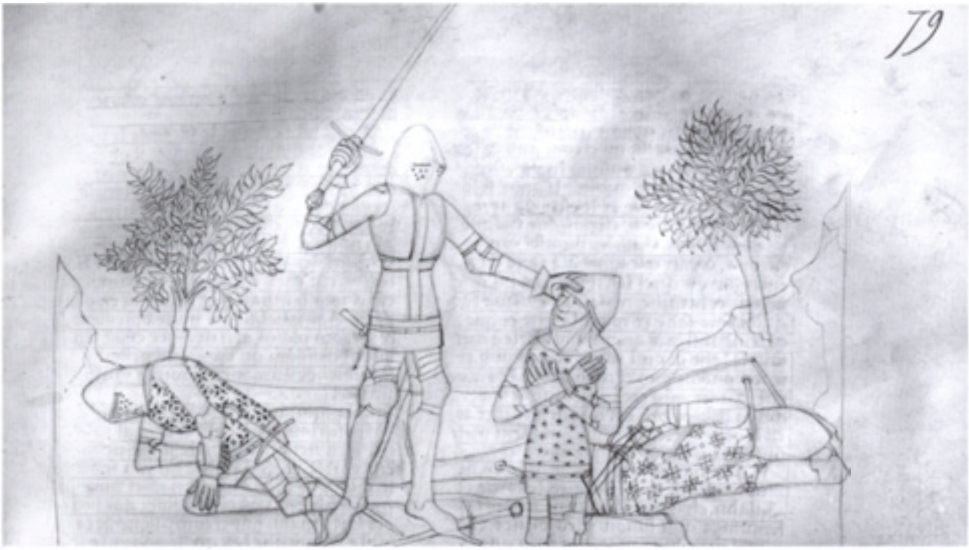
A royal crusader, marked with the sign of the cross. This image from the Westminster psalter, c.1250, may be intended to depict King Henry III himself. (Bridgeman Art Library)

The three main strands of the chivalric ethos – warrior, courtier and Christian – might, as we have seen, throw up some contradictions, but on the whole the knight was able to ignore these, adapting courtly behaviour and Christian teaching to fit with the martial ethic. The differing strands fused together, building on each other to create a mode of behaviour that was at the same time practical and violent and idealistic and spiritual. The way in which this process worked can be seen in the ritual surrounding the making of a knight.

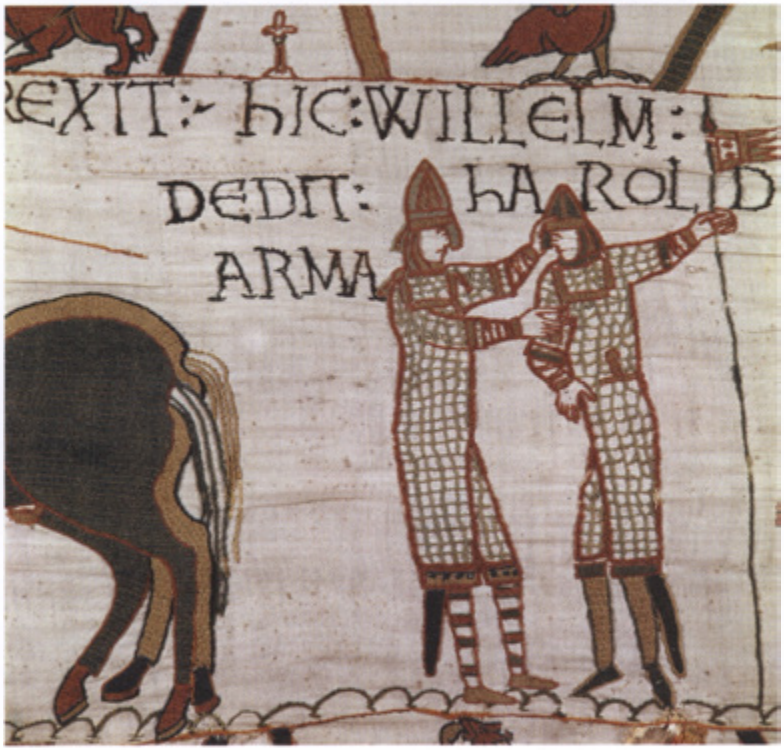
The origin of the ceremony lay within the warrior ethic, being the ancient tradition of giving the warrior his arms. This can be seen in the lord making a gift of arms to his retainer. This is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian *heriot*, the death-duty of arms, armour and mount payable to the deceased's lord, effectively the return of weapons and armour loaned to a retainer to enable him to perform his martial service. Beowulf gave arms and armour to the men who became his retainers. There may be something of this act in the depiction of William the Bastard and Harold in the Bayeux Tapestry: William places a helmet on Harold's head beneath the legend *Hic Willelm dedit Haroldo arma*: 'Here William gives Harold arms.' The delivery of weapons was also a rite of passage marking a youth's coming of age, and an ancient one recorded as a custom of the Germanic tribes by the second-century Roman historian Tacitus.

Both these aspects of conferring weapons and armour were present within the act of 'dubbing' the knight. To some extent the young squire began his adult life at his knighting (although the *tirones* – the young knights without ties of land or marriage – were still seen as young and boisterous). The importance placed on who performed the actual ceremony, and the desire to be knighted by a man of status and prowess added an element of submission and deference to the proceedings. Even if there was no formal act of homage between the lord conveying knighthood and the recipient, it helped to reinforce the ties between noble houses. Similarly, the mass knightings of the 14th century drew knights together through the shared ritual. Often these groups formed *familiae*, especially if they were knighted alongside a prince or young nobleman, such as the Black Prince, who was knighted with a number of his household and friends at the onset of the Crécy campaign. By their close association with the prince, it also enhanced their social standing.

It was such royal ceremonies that saw the introduction of courtliness and pageantry into the proceedings. The mass knightings enhanced the grandeur of the occasion, which became as much a political statement as a rite of passage.



A knight is dubbed on the field. The aspirant knight, on his knees, is about to receive the *collée*, the blow that should serve to remind him of his knightly duties. (Bridgeman Art Library)

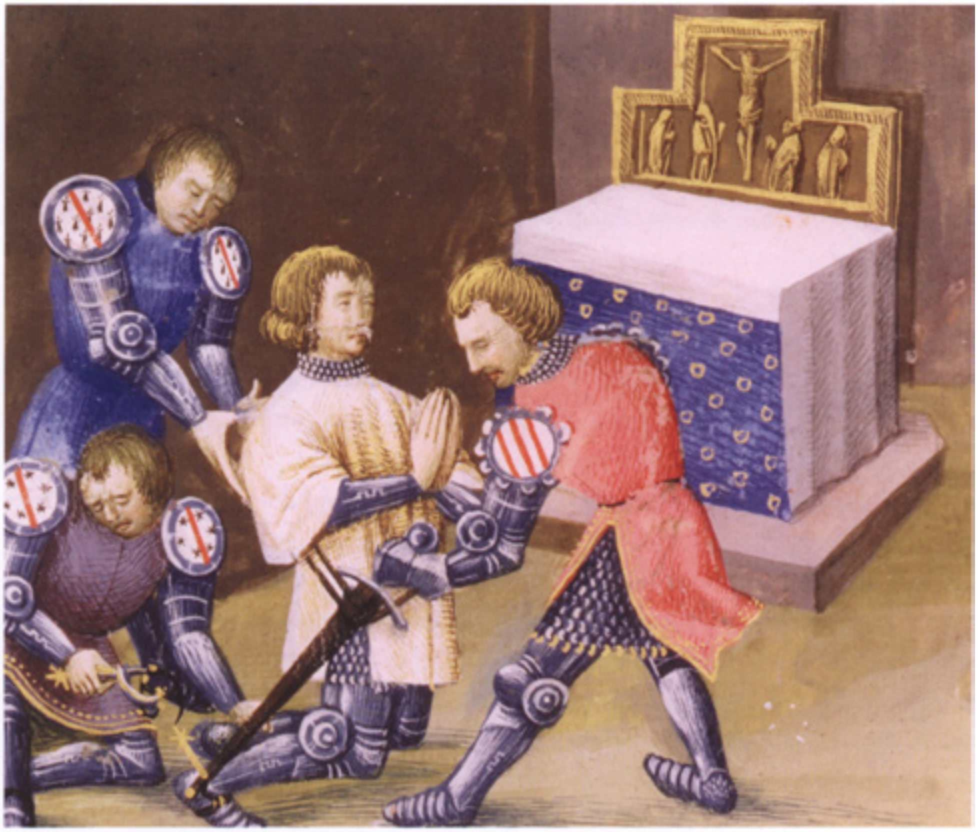


William's gift of arms and armour to Harold, depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, might be seen as a gesture of generosity, but it was also symbolic of Harold's submission to William as his lord. (Scala)

The dubbing ceremony also came to share traits with coronation rituals. Besides the blessing and presentation of a sword, there was a statement of the duties of both roles, in particular that of protecting the *inermes*, the defenceless population, upholding the peace and dispensing justice. The introduction of this announcement of the knight's duties, accompanied by the *collée*, a blow aimed at driving the point home, was almost certainly in part a result of the coming together of knighthood and nobility; but such sentiments were also analogous to those espoused by the Peace of God movements, and it is probably those movements that helped to bring the tenets of protection and justice into the chivalric sphere, as the bishops and clergy behind them sought to bind the local knights into supporting these same precepts.

The involvement of the Church within the dubbing ritual is clear. When Raymon Lull described the process in the early 1280s he imbued each element with Christian symbolism: the bath was a purification akin to baptism, the white shirt the recipient wore marked this purity, his white belt was a symbol of his chastity and the sword, blessed and taken from the altar, symbolized his duty to protect and dispense justice. His description is almost identical to that given by the 12th-century Norman chronicler Jean of Marmoutier of the knighting of Geoffrey of Anjou by Henry I of England in 1128. Again, there was a ritual bath, after which Geoffrey was dressed, though not in a white shirt representing his purity but in a tunic of cloth of gold indicative of his social position. Gilded spurs were fixed to his heels and then a sword was strapped to his waist by the king himself.

About 200 years later the Church prepared a liturgy for the making of a knight. It is almost identical to the process described above. Even here, however, there is no mention of a priest being involved. The act of creating a knight remained a secular one; although the ceremony might take place in a church, and might be imbued with Christian symbolism and significance, it was performed not by churchmen but by secular lords.



A knight receives his spurs and sword. Although this ceremony takes place before an altar, it is a purely secular one and all of the ritual is being performed by fellow knights. (Bridgeman Art Library)

THE DISSEMINATION OF THE IDEA

The *collée* was not the sole means by which the knight learnt of the duties and responsibilities of his calling; the chivalric code was drummed into him in a variety of forms and ways. The popularity of epic and romance literature, and of men like the German *Minnesänger*, ensured that the concepts were spread throughout Europe and the Latin East. Whilst it can be debated how seriously the tales were taken, and it is certain that their primary purpose was to entertain rather than to educate the knight about proper conduct, the knight certainly identified himself with the heroes. The satirical *The Vows of the Heron*, a 14th-century work poking fun at the contemporary fashion for making outrageous promises to perform grand chivalric feats, reads:

> When we are in taverns, drinking the strong wines, and the ladies near who look at us, drawing the kerchiefs round their smooth necks, their grey eyes resplendent with beauty smiling, nature provokes us to have desire in our hearts to contend, looking for mercy as the result. Then we conquer Yaumont and Aguilant, and others conquer Oliver and Roland.

The influence of these tales is further demonstrated by the Arthurian themes that were adopted for the high and late medieval pageants and tournaments, not to mention their role within the establishment of the Order of the Garter and other secular knightly orders.

Chroniclers' tales of chivalric behaviour undoubtedly worked in a similar way, but perhaps with a more overtly didactic purpose. Orderic's tale of the *mesnie Hellequin*, for example, might be presented as reportage, recording a miraculous event from his local area, but the fact that it was a knight who stopped to warn Walchelin to change his ways and provided the details of the knights' torments, is no coincidence: Orderic had his audience in mind here. The secular chronicler such as Froissart, whose purpose in writing his chronicles was 'that the honourable enterprises, noble adventures, and deeds of arms, performed in the wars between England and France, may be properly related, and held in perpetual remembrance – to the end that brave men taking example from them may be encouraged in their well-doing', offered up tales of individuals whose behaviour could be aspired to. These messages were largely subliminal; the knightly audience would pick up on the positive and negative images of chivalrous and unchivalrous acts in the course of the narrative without the chronicler having to drive the point home.

Not at all subtle were the ecclesiastical writers who chose the vices of secular knighthood as a subject for missives and homilies. Warnings and invective against vainglory, pride and attacks on the defenceless and the property of the Church, and exhortations to pursue a merciful and Christian chivalry were very common topics directed at a knightly audience. Bernard of Clairvaux's exaltation of the Knights Templar, *In Praise of a New Knighthood*, is the epitome of this kind of material; and is addressed directly at the secular knight, in part to encourage him to join the ascetic and holy Templars but also in order to chastise him for his sins.

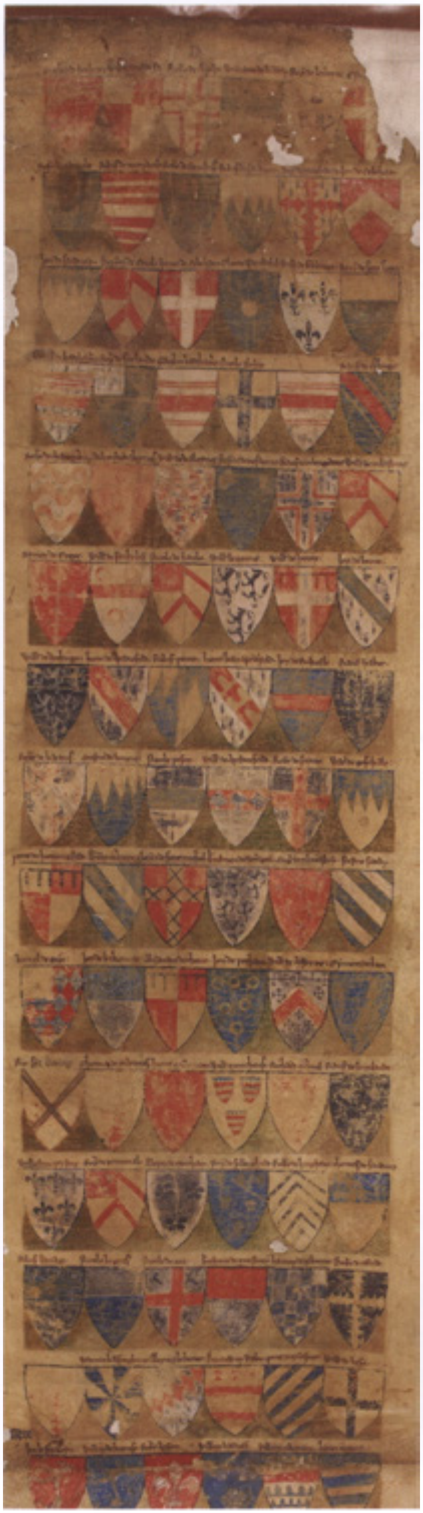
As chivalry became more complex in the 14th century, and responding to a more legalistic approach to matters of honour, the chivalric elite itself began to offer their advice on chivalric matters. The *Book of Chivalry* of Geoffrey de Charny is very much the advice of an experienced and chivalrous warrior to the aspirant or newly knighted bachelor. Around the same time he also prepared a series of questions that raised some of the more complex issues of chivalric behaviour on both the tournament field and at war. For example, it asks whether, if a knight at tournament is knocked from his horse because his saddle-girth fails, his opponent should win his horse. These appear to have been prepared for his fellow members of the Order of the Star, founded by Jean II of France in imitation of Edward III's Order of the Garter. One can imagine these questions being asked around the table after one of the Order's annual feasts, Charny setting the questions and awaiting the answers of the assembled knights.

Indeed similar conversations were probably common to such meetings; their Chapters were, after all, formal meetings to discuss such matters as arose between members of the Order. There must have been informal discussions and debates as well, and one can easily imagine such conversations taking place over the dining table after a day on the tournament field. More than any of the written works on chivalry these informal discussions would have been the key vehicle for the transmission of the constantly evolving chivalric ethos.

CHIVALRY ON DISPLAY – HERALDRY, BANNERS AND BADGES

One of the key aspects of the chivalric ethos was that the warrior enhanced his status and position by performing acts of martial prowess. It was not sufficient that such deeds be done, it was also necessary that they be witnessed and recognized. It can be no coincidence that at the same period as the chivalric ethos was coalescing and knights began to think of themselves as a distinctive caste within society that heraldic display also developed. These personal emblems, supposedly unique to the individual warrior, ensured that their deeds could be witnessed across the battlefield by friend and foe alike. This was certainly how they were perceived as originating. In the late 14th-century text on heraldry, the *Tractatus de Armis* by Johannes de Bado Aureo, this initial use of heraldry was traced to antiquity where, at the siege of Troy, Johannes writes, 'The Trojans of royal blood adopted distinctive colours so that they might be recognized from the walls, and their deeds and prowess in combat noticed'. The clear display of his arms ensured that the warrior's participation in battle was noted and any deeds of great note would be witnessed and remembered by his fellow knights or by the heralds who are often described as standing on the sidelines of the battle recording such matters. It is from such remembrances that men like Froissart were able to draw up their chronicles.

The ability to identify the enemy force served an important tactical function, allowing a commander to better judge where the greatest strength of his opponents might be found. It also fulfilled an important social one. Recognition of the identity, status and prowess of the opposition enabled the knight perhaps to choose his opponents with an eye to winning renown himself or avoiding a combat in which he would be outclassed. A knight of great notoriety made himself a target for those who would increase their own renown by defeating him, but he might also deter attack. At the battle of Bouvines Eudo of Burgundy used this to his advantage, putting on a



surcoat bearing the arms of the much-feared knight William of Barres, 'whose deeds of derring-do had gone before him as far as Syria' in order to awe his opponents. He bore his own shield however; a *ruse de guerre* was one thing, but it was important to Eudo that his own presence would still be noted. Noting the arms of Jan van Renesse amongst the Flemish lords ranged at Courtrai, Geoffrey of Brabant said that 'he is to be feared the most. In the whole world there are no six men better in war than he,' and advised against fighting that day.

The display of heraldic arms on the field marked one out as a prize to be captured, and might therefore save the knight's life. As we have noted, the members of the chivalric elite were reluctant to kill each other, seeking instead the capture and ransom of opponents rather than their death. Wearing heraldic arms identified the wearer as a part of the military elite and therefore deserving of this special treatment. When the Earl of Gloucester rushed out on the second morning of Bannockburn, wounded and indignant at Edward II's suggestion of his cowardice, he failed to put on his surcoat and in the press was killed by the Scots who would have spared him had they been able to recognize his identity and status.

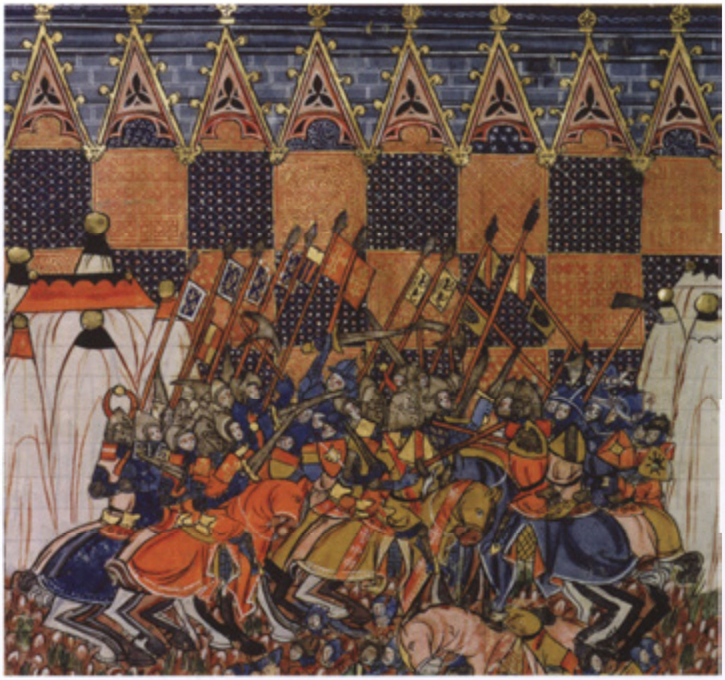
Heraldry proper developed out of the symbols born by lords on their shields and banners, and shared by their retainers. William Marshal, when he first became a knight, bore into battle the arms of his lord the Sire de Tancarville. It was not until he had gained sufficient wealth and status to raise his own household that he began to bear his own arms – a red lion on a shield divided vertically green and gold. During the latter half of the 12th century, and as the knightly class developed in terms of their social status and their sense of themselves as a caste, it became increasingly important to individual knights that their own deeds be witnessed and recognized, and so they began to wear individual images, distinct from those of their lord. (They might, however, choose to use elements of their lord's arms in their own, advertising the link between themselves and the lord.)

As knightly families established themselves within the social elite and held land, so coats of arms became hereditary, being worn by all the male line, each kinsman's arms 'differenced' by the inclusion of extra symbols laid over the main arms. As men married into other armorial families they might wear the arms of that family too, 'quartering them' alongside their own on the shield. Over the generations, and with each marriage, such quarterings could become increasingly complex, the shields divided and divided again in order to show the full family tree of the knight who bore it.

Heraldry, therefore, came to serve an important social function. Worn on clothing and jewellery, displayed on the stone work of the knight's home and the churches and chapels he endowed, it announced to all viewers the pedigree and social connections of the knight who bore it. These same social and familial ties were of equal importance on the battlefield, however. Martial prowess was believed to be inherited, and passed down through the generations, in a similar way to good bloodstock in the breeding of horses. Orderic Vitalis says of the knight William son of Giroie 'whilst he fought in the battles of the world, [he] had been a knight of great renown, formidable to his enemies and faithful to his friends. His sons and brothers and many nephews were redoubtable warriors, who struck terror into the hearts of their enemies far and near.' The family's reputation for prowess reflected on each individual and, equally, the individual bore the family's arms onto the field and in doing so increased the honour and reputation of the family by his deeds.

The importance of the hereditary aspect of heraldic display, and of displaying one's lineage on the field of battle, is shown by the fact that as they became more complicated and complex, with a greater number of divisions, there arose a distinction between a knight's arms of war and arms of peace. The latter, reserved for the tournament field, comprised his badge or *devise*, a personal emblem of which the knight might have many, whilst the full coat of arms was to be worn in war. Thus the Black Prince had a black shield adorned with three ostrich feathers as his arms of peace, but in war he carried the royal arms of England, quartered with those of France – as his father had adopted them when he commenced his claim to the throne of France – distinguished by a white 'label', a tabbed strip across the top of the shield to mark him as the eldest son of Edward III, who bore the arms 'undifferenced'. If the function of heraldry had been purely one of identification then it would have made more sense for the simpler and more readily recognizable 'arms of peace' to be worn on the battlefield whilst the full heraldic achievement was reserved for the tournament field, where the distinction of one knight from another, of friend from foe, was a less immediate concern.

Opposite: The Dering roll, c.1270, the oldest extant English roll of arms. These were working documents, serving to remind heralds which knights had attended a particular tournament or battle, and acting as a ready reckoner for the identification of knights at subsequent engagements. (© British Library)



The slain lie at the feet of fighting warriors in this battle scene from a 14th-century biography of Godfrey de Bouillon. The chivalric ethos both encouraged violence and sought to limit it. Inevitably there would still be casualties. (Bridgeman Art Library)

Heraldry, then, served as an index of a knight's personal prowess and status and that of his family and those with whom he had a social affinity. It is no wonder that these symbols were so jealously guarded, and there were bitter disputes between knights who found themselves bearing the same coat of arms. The most famous of such disputes was that between the Scrope and Grosvenor families, both of whom bore the arms *azure, a bend or* – blue with a diagonal stripe of gold. In 1386 the dispute was brought before the Court of Chivalry, which was set up to deal with these sorts of matters. Interestingly, the outcome rested on not only who had borne the arms first, and a extensive series of witnesses were called for their recollections of this, but also on what occasion, and it is clear from the transcripts that certain forms of military endeavour rated more highly than others: a pitched battle over a skirmish and crusades over secular campaigns. In the end the Court found in favour of Scrope, and the Grosvenor family were instructed to change their arms, henceforward bearing *argent, a garb or*, the diagonal stripe being replaced by a wheat-sheaf.

Amongst the anecdotes that come down to us from the proceedings of this case one of the witnesses, John Charnels, told how Sir William Scrope had to be restrained from killing a captured French knight because he bore the same arms. It is clear that whilst chivalric writers such as Raymon Lull and jurists such as the 14th-century Italian Bartolus might argue that there was no bar to men bearing the same coat of arms provided that it did no damage to either's interests, and if they served under different lords so that there was no danger of confusion, the knights themselves had a much more stringent view of the rights and wrongs of the matter. Froissart records how during the truce before the battle of Poitiers, as the churchmen tried to bring the French and Anglo-Gascon armies to terms, the English banneret Sir John Chandos and the French marshal Jean de Clermont rode out to view their opponent's lines and realized that they were both wearing the same *devise*; an image of the Virgin Mary surrounded by sunrays. The two men clashed at this socially awkward moment, Clermont stating that the English 'can invent nothing new, but must take for your own whatever you see handsome belonging to others' and adding that were there no truce then he would prove by deed of arms that he had the greater right to the use of the image. Froissart completes the anecdote by recording the fact that Clermont was killed in the battle the following day and that 'some say this treatment was owing to his altercation on the preceding day with Sir John Chandos'. The anecdote of a socially awkward chivalric moment is interesting because the image they fought over was not either men's arms – Chandos bore a white shield with a red vertical stripe, whilst Clermont's arms were a red shield covered in gold trefoils with two fish depicted vertically in gold, all surmounted by a blue label – suggesting that knights and lord might also be proprietorial about their *devises*, the informal system of badges that was used alongside the hereditary and systematic heraldic arms.

These were not individual symbols in the way that heraldry was, but rather emblems denoting membership of a group – a household, retinue or town militia – or, from the point of view of a lord, ownership and power over that group. Although some derived from the heraldic arms this did not have to be the case. Charles IV of France selected the device of a winged hart for his expedition to Flanders in 1382 following a dream in which he was carried to the county on the back of such a beast. Edward IV of England's adoption of the sun in splendour followed after his victory at Mortimer's Cross in 1461 during the Wars of the Roses which was preceded by the miraculous sight of a parhelion – seemingly three suns in the sky at once. Others may have begun as field signs, *ad hoc* symbols selected on the day of battle to identify friend from foe. A number of badges might be used by any particular lord or group; they were not hereditary. As such there was far greater opportunity for confusion than with heraldry. At another engagement of the Wars of the Roses, the battle of Barnet in 1471, which was fought in a mist, troops belonging to the Earl of Warwick attacked their allies under the Earl of Oxford because the latter's emblem of a star with streamers was so similar to the sun with streamers badge of King Edward IV, their mutual enemy.

THE LIMITATIONS OF CHIVALRY

If Froissart's sources were right in saying that the disagreement between Chandos and Clermont led to the latter's death on the field of Poitiers, then it serves as a reminder that no matter how much the chivalric code might appear to have limited the violence of knightly combat, it could also be a spur to violent behaviour. The acquisition of status and personal honour could only be achieved through acts of martial prowess. Maintenance of the code required fierce protection of it against all challenges and threats; hence Chandos and Scrope's responses to the perceived loss of their identity, and the need for the *Fechtbücher* and fight-masters to train men for judicial combat and duels in the 15th and 16th centuries. The rash, almost suicidal behaviour of the Earl of Gloucester at Bannockburn and the Count of Artois and the Templars at Mansourah reflects the competitive nature of the chivalric ethos. The tables of honour set up in the chapters of secular orders, and the prizes awarded at the end of tournaments for those agreed to have shown the greatest ability, encouraged knights to try to outdo each other, vying to be the most highly regarded warrior. The romance tales both reflected and encouraged this attitude. They are full of challenges and insults repaid in combat, the defence of honour and its acquisition through martial victory. Chivalry was a code predicated on acts of violence and its use was accepted and lauded, provided the knight did not derive too much pleasure from its brutality.

FIGHTING FOR LOVE: ULRICH VON LICHTENSTEIN

A name made famous by Hollywood, there was a real Ulrich von Lichtenstein. Born of a noble family in the Duchy of Styria (in what is now central Austria) some time around 1200, he was knighted along with 249 others at the betrothal of the daughter of the Duke of Austria. He served as an administrator in his native duchy, married and had children; his son, also named Ulrich, married the daughter of Conrad von Goldegg, a powerful vassal and administrator of the Archbishop of Salzburg. He died at the age of 78 and was buried in Sekau, the site of a Benedictine monastery.

In this regard Ulrich's career is uninspiring, typical of so many of the minor nobility across Europe, and he would be of relatively little account except that he was a *Minnesänger*, one of the collection of German princes, nobles, knights and clerics famed for their verse. His poem, *Frauendienst* or 'The Service of Ladies', rather than being a retelling of heroic romance or a political poem, is a supposedly autobiographical work detailing his experience of *fin amors*.

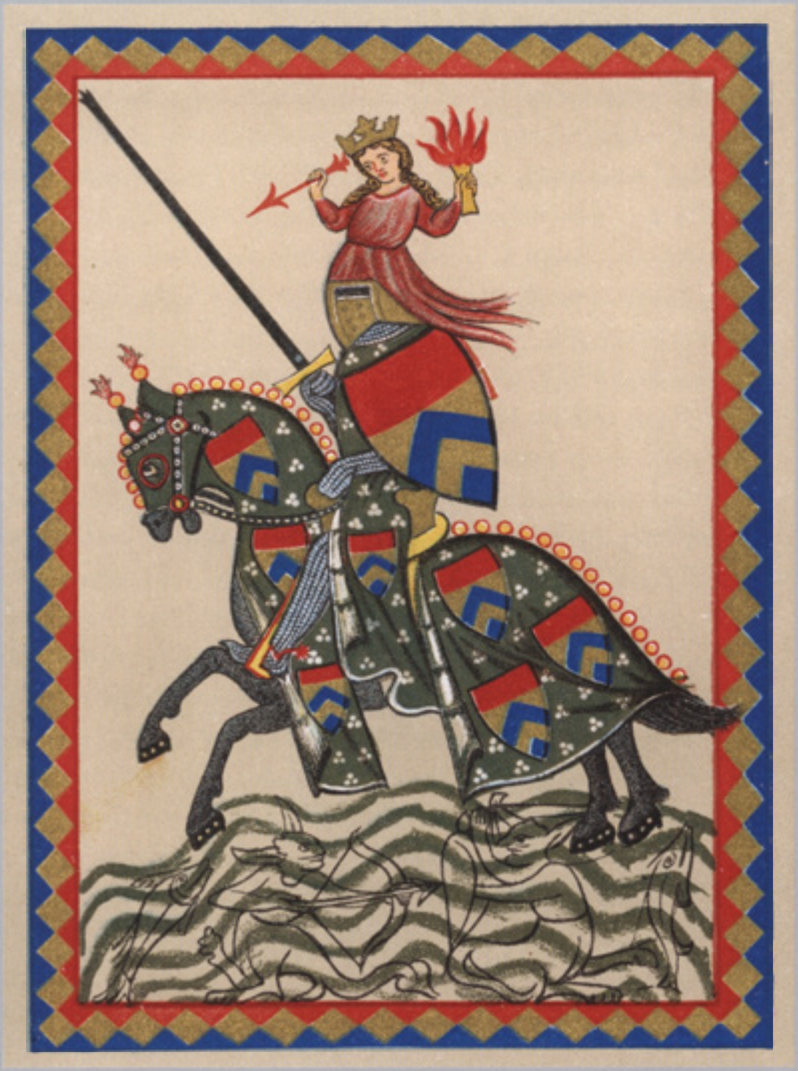
Falling for his lady at the age of 12, whilst serving as her page, Ulrich determined to serve her as a wandering 'knight errant', proving his devotion and love by deeds of arms. As was right and proper in matters of courtly love the object of his desire was older and more high-born than he, and spurned his advances, declaring him to be of too little renown and ugly because of his hare lip. Rather than give up his pursuit, Ulrich had his lip operated on and undertook to travel widely, building his reputation as a fine tourneyer.

His lip was not the only physical sacrifice he was to make. At Trieste he was struck on the hand, leaving a finger hanging by a thread. Although a doctor was able to save it, Ulrich had sent a message to his lady that he had lost it. When she challenged him for the lie, Ulrich had a friend cut it off and sent it to her, attached to a love poem. Even though the lady kept this macabre gift, still she declared herself unmoved by his devotion.

He then embarked on perhaps the most bizarre aspect of his already strange tale. He sent out a letter in the guise of Venus to knights from northern Italy to the border of Bohemia, challenging them to prove their love for their ladies by jousting with him. Each knight who broke a lance was to win a gold ring to give to his lady, whilst each man unhorsed by Ulrich was to bow in honour of Ulrich's (still unnamed and secret) lady.

At each of the tournament venues on the journey he arrived dressed as Venus, in gown, veil and a wig of blonde tresses, and accompanied by a fine retinue of servants and pages all clad in white. Many knights took up the theme of this grand chivalric spectacle, greeting him as the Goddess of Love, fêting him at banquets and pageants and appearing on the tournament field in their finest array to fight with him. One knight appeared wearing the habit of a monk over his armour and a tonsured wig covering his helmet. At first Ulrich refused to fight him; dressing as a woman was acceptable in the context of a chivalric pageant but, for Ulrich at least, dressing as a monk was not. When he was persuaded by the other knights to accept the challenge, he made sure to make the knight pay for his blasphemy by striking him square on the helmet, knocking him senseless.

The *Venusfahrt*, 'The journey of Venus', lasted five weeks, during which time Ulrich fought in both



Ulrich von Lichtenstein, depicted in the 13th-century *Manesse Codex*. He is shown riding to tournament, his lance tipped by a coronel and displaying his heraldry on surcoat, shield and comparison. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

single combat and mass *mêlée*, breaking a total of 307 lances and awarding 271 rings. His fame spread throughout the region, yet even this was not enough for his lady. He was to suffer further indignities in her pursuit, including dressing as a leper and being urinated on by a watchman whilst in hiding outside her castle, but it was only when he undertook to go on crusade that she finally offered her love, although Ulrich refrains from telling us how she did so.

Whether Ulrich's tale is true or not, it was most certainly exaggerated and composed primarily for the amusement and entertainment of his fellow courtiers. It embodies the combination of courtly love and knightly virtue that lay at the heart of chivalry in the high middle ages, and his exploits, at least as he recounts them in his book, far surpass those of his namesake on the silver screen.

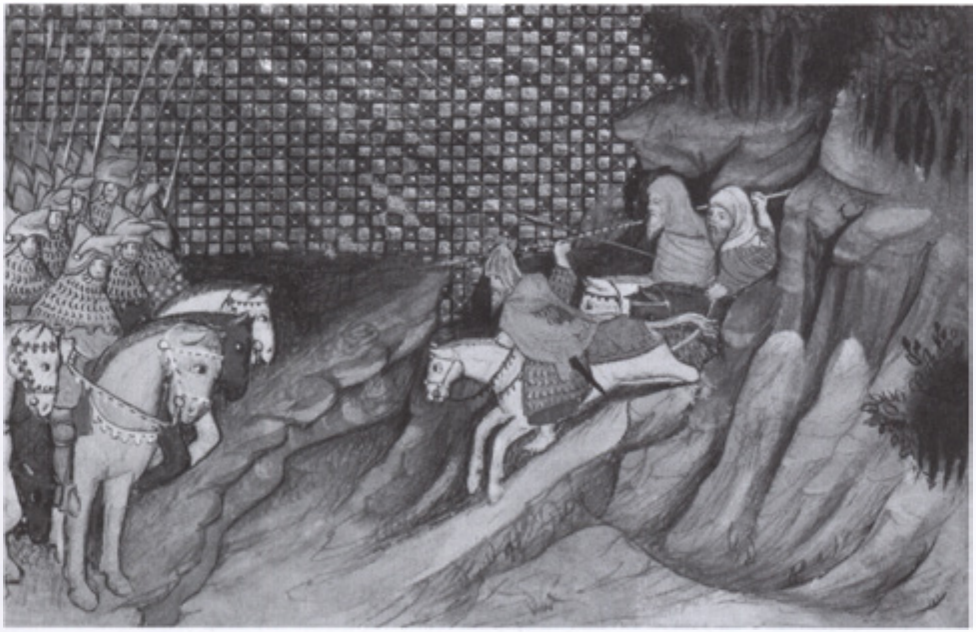
Beyond those confines chivalry's writ did not run. When Geoffrey of Anjou talks about owing a special compassion towards knights, there is an unspoken yet obvious corollary that this compassion did not extend to those beyond the knightly rank. From an economic point of view the lowly *pedites*, the common footsoldiers, had no ransom value and were not worth taking alive. The weapons of most of these men – the spear, pike, bow and crossbow – meant that they could defeat the knight at a distance, rendering him impotent on the field. This is the reason crossbowmen were so often picked out for particularly harsh treatment. They could kill the greatest knight without putting themselves in any great danger, or indeed breaking into a sweat. The relationship between the two formed something of a vicious circle. The knightly class would not spare the footsoldier, who expecting no mercy offered none and fought all the harder. In turn, this hardened the attitudes of the knightly class towards the foot.

Even amongst their own armies the treatment of footsoldiers and knights could be grossly disproportionate. Before the assault on Messina in 1190, Richard the Lionheart proclaimed that men who ran from the battlefield were to be punished; knights by the loss of their belt, but footsoldiers by the loss of a foot. At both Courtrai and Crécy French knights rode down their own crossbowmen, in the first instance because they feared that they might take all of the glory and in the second because they appeared to be achieving too little. When the crusader army captured the Cathar town of Béziers in 1209, during the Albigensian Crusade, William of Tudela tells us that the footsoldiers, first into the city 'had settled into the houses they had taken, all of them full of riches and treasure, but when the French [knights] discovered this they went nearly mad with rage and drove the soldiers out with clubs, like dogs...'

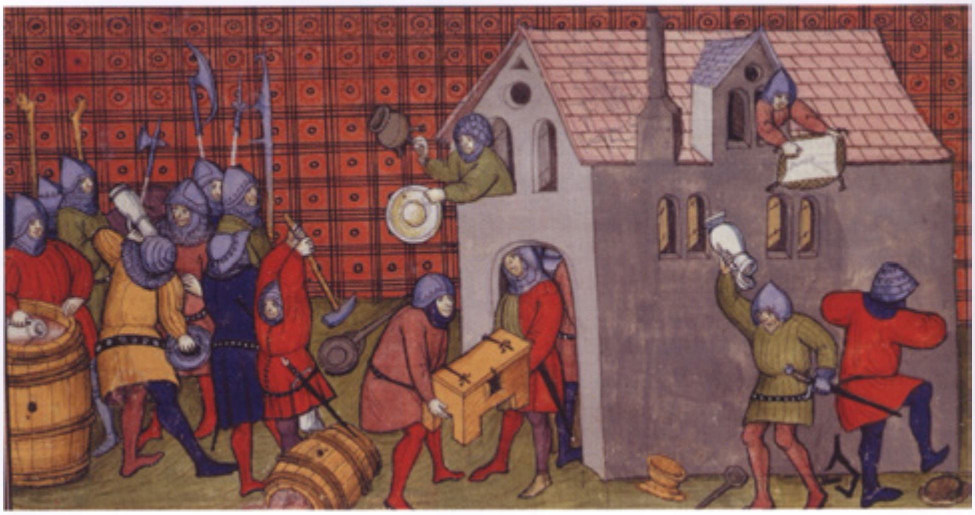
Describing the aftermath of Crécy Froissart notes that 'Among the English there were pillagers and irregulars, Welsh and Cornishmen armed with long knives, who went out after the French and, when they found any in difficulty, whether they were counts, barons, knights or squires, they killed them without mercy. Because of this, many were slaughtered that evening, regardless of their rank.' These men had no stake in the chivalric process; being pillagers and irregulars they lay outside of the arrangements for the division of ransom. They would get more from the personal effects of a dead knight than the captured body of a live one.

It is worth noting that as well as identifying them to be irregulars, Froissart distinguishes these men as Cornish and Welsh. Chivalry was a Catholic and Western European phenomenon, limited to the cultural milieu emanating from the lands of the old Carolingian Empire. Wars with peoples from beyond these cultural boundaries were not fought according to chivalric principles, primarily because their opponents did not adhere to them themselves. Often there is also an element of racial discrimination. In England's wars against the Welsh and the Irish it is clear that they were believed to be culturally inferior. During the 11th and 12th centuries it was common for English writers to describe the barbarity and backwardness of these peoples. When the Scots raided into northern England they were supposed to have killed men, women and children, spitting babies on the tips of their spears and drinking blood. We have already seen how Aelred of Riveaulx, in his account of the Battle of the Standard, dismisses the highland Scots because they wore no armour; he concludes the speech with the suggestion that the Anglo-Norman forces fight not men but cruel beasts. Gerald of Wales' accounts of the Welsh and Irish are a little less colourful and slightly more balanced, but even he emphasizes their lack of mercy to opponents, noting that whilst in France 'knights are taken prisoner, here [in Wales and Ireland] they are beheaded; there they are ransomed, here they are butchered'. He also records the shock of the Anglo-Norman forces when, after they defeated an Irish force at Ossory in 1169, their Irish allies started taking the heads of their slain enemies. The same sorts of ideas and rhetoric were used for the peoples of the Baltic, Prussia and Livonians, who were also beyond the chivalric boundary as pagans.

Things were not so clear cut in the Latin East. The similarities between the martial aristocracies of Islam and Western Europe meant that the former, despite being 'infidels', might be accorded treatment far more in keeping with chivalric ideals than were the Christian but less familiar warrior chiefs of, say, Gaelic Ireland. According to the mid-13th-century poem the *Ordene de chevalrie*, a knight called Hugh of Tiberias won his freedom from the Muslims by instructing the Islamic leader Saladin about



The meeting of two different military cultures is made plain in this image of the conference between the Duke of Gloucester and the Irish chief Art MacMurrough. MacMurrough's armour and clothing, his lack of stirrups and his wielding of a javelin contrast greatly with the heavy armour of the English knights. His appearance out of a cleft in the wilderness also emphasizes how this English artist perceived the Irish as wild and uncivilized. (© British Library)



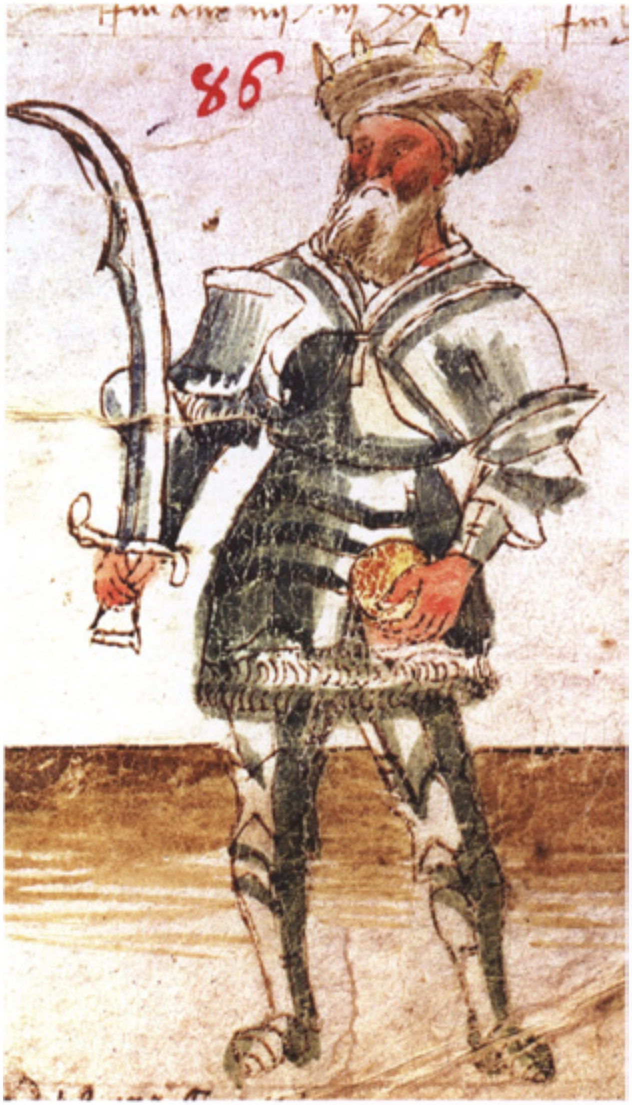
Pillaging and looting were an inevitable aspect of warfare, and even the most chivalrous were not above indulging. (© British Library)

chivalry and knighting him. This story may have had a basis in fact; it was recorded in one eyewitness account of the siege of Acre that a knight Henry of Tolon, who had been accused of being overly familiar with the Muslims, had knighted Saladin. Richard the Lionheart knighted Saladin's nephew, the son of Al-Adil his brother and emissary to the Christians, after the two men struck up a friendship and mutual respect during their negotiations. The gesture was returned by Al-Adil in August 1192 when he sent two Arab stallions to Richard during his defence of Jaffa after hearing that there was a shortage of horses amongst the crusaders. He did so 'as a token of his admiration' in order that Richard might continue the fight on horseback.

The idealism of chivalry was tempered by the pragmatism of the warrior and the practicalities of waging war. The strong current of Christian piety that ran through high medieval chivalry and the Church's influence in its tenets and development should have ensured that churches remained sacrosanct and the defenceless protected. Even a cursory study of medieval campaigns shows that this was far from the case.

Churches were repositories of wealth and as such were a great temptation to armies. For many commanders they were sources of revenue essential for keeping their armies in the field. During his campaign against his father in 1183 Henry the Young King stripped the altars, statutes and reliquaries of several abbeys in the Limoges region to pay for his mercenary troops. It was not just the Church's own wealth and relics that were on offer. Churches were usually the strongest and most easily defended building in a region, and during times of strife it was normal for people to seek shelter for themselves and their goods, making use of this strength and also relying on the sanctuary power of the Church. The Council of Lillebonne in 1080 allowed refugees to build homesteads in churchyards, so long as they left when peace returned. In 1139, during the war between Stephen and Matilda, it was recorded that there were so many refugees seeking sanctuary in Worcester Cathedral from an expected attack by Robert of Gloucester that the monks had no space to perform divine service. When all of these goods were brought into one place the temptation to breach sanctuary and collect the booty of war could prove too great.

The sanctuary of the Church was even more at risk when those seeking it were combatants. When Royalists used the nunnery of St Etheldreda at Wilton as a sanctuary from the forces of Matilda under Robert of Gloucester in 1143, the latter dragged them from the church. The political desire for their capture, and the financial benefit of their ransom weighed more than his regard for the sanctity of the Church. The solidity of the churches also made them useful as makeshift fortifications and this was often used as a pretext for sacking them, as was the case for Robert of Gloucester's attack on Stephen at Lincoln in 1141.



Saladin, from a 15th-century Italian manuscript. The similarities in the aristocratic cultures of the Western European and Muslim world meant that a figure like Saladin could become thought of as knightly, noble and chivalrous. (Bridgeman Art Library)

Despite the image portrayed by the romances and the majority of manuscript illustrations, war did not occur in a vacuum, and whilst the protection of the *inermes*, the defenceless, was a key tenet of both chivalry and the Peace of God movements on which it drew for inspiration, it was neither possible nor desirable to insulate them completely from the effects of war.

Henry V famously said that war without fire was like sausages without mustard. As we have seen, the raiding and devastation of enemy territory was an inevitable and essential part of the conduct of war. It provided the raiders with supplies and booty and it challenged the authority of the lord of the land being devastated. The Peace of God movements recognized that the land and holdings of an enemy were fair game in war, including caveats to that effect. Honoré Bonet might write that 'In these days, all wars are directed against the poor labouring people and against their goods and chattels. I do not call that war, but it seems to me to be pillage and robbery. Further that way of warfare does not follow the ordinances of worthy chivalry' but Bertrand du Born could write with tongue only slightly in cheek that 'life will be good, when one takes from the usurers their wealth, and no pack horse goes on the roads even by day in safety, nor townsmen without fear, nor any merchant coming from France; rather will he be rich who is ready to plunder.'

It was perhaps in sieges that the civilian suffered the greatest direct hardship. In siege warfare the line between the non-combatant and the soldier was blurred. Civilians were often actively involved in the defence itself, and thus they became combatants. In many cases the defence of a town fell upon its own citizens through the 'watch' who would defend sections of wall. But even when there was a military garrison it was expected that the civilian population would assist. At any rate the citizens of a town might expect to share in the hardships and dangers suffered by the garrison. Medieval siege engines were hardly smart, precision-guided munitions, and a stone lobbed by a *trebuchet* was as likely to kill a civilian as it was a soldier. The suburbs of a town, the houses and workshops that lay beyond the walls and defences, might be pulled down to prevent them from being used by the besiegers as protection as they either undermined the walls or launched an assault.

A close siege would see disease and starvation rife amongst both the citizens and the armed garrison. On very many occasions the town's commander would be forced to eject all of those not able to participate in the defence – the young, the old and infirm – to try to stretch food and water supplies further. Whilst the hope might be that the defenders would let these refugees through their lines, all too often they refused and, as happened at the siege of Chateau Gaillard in 1204 or Rouen between July 1418 and January 1419, the civilians might find themselves trapped between the two armies who watched as they starved to death.

No wonder there was often conflict between civic leaders and the commanders of the garrisons established to protect them. There could be extreme tensions between the requirements of a good military vassal and the town's willingness to hold out. At Bridgnorth in 1102 the captains and burgesses of the town, held for the rebel earl Robert de Bellême against Henry I of England, agreed to surrender to the king in spite of the protests of the paid knights, the *milites stipendarii*, and locked the mercenaries in the keep whilst they negotiated the handover.

One of the main reasons why towns were more willing to seek terms was that the penalty for resisting too long was that the besieging troops would be allowed free rein to ravage the town, looting what they wanted. The sack of Limoges by the forces of the Black Prince in 1370, in which his army 'burst into the city ... all in a mood to wreak havoc and do murder, killing indiscriminately' was ordered by the prince as a punishment for its revolt and swift defection to the cause of France. After Edward III's siege of Calais in 1347, which had taken a year to fall, the king had to be dissuaded from sacking the town for much the same reasons. This unwritten rule, which had existed at least since the time of classical Rome, was not merely a method of encouraging a rapid end to the siege, however. It was also a recognition that commanders could not control their troops after an assault. The privation suffered by a besieging army could be as great as that suffered by the besieged and an assault was perhaps the most dangerous of martial activities requiring huge reserves of courage. A successful assault resulted in an immense release of fear and energy in which concepts such as chivalry and mercy were swamped.

Chivalry and the pleadings of the Church and legalists might help to prevent the worst excesses of raiding against the civilian population, but at his heart the knight was a practical warrior, willing to lay aside the principles of his caste if that was what the situation called for. The same knightly lords who would kill captured enemy crossbowmen were only too willing to use their own against their fellow knights, and *ruses de guerre* were a common and accepted part of warfare. The use of false colours, such as Edward's approach towards Simon de Montfort at Evesham under the banners captured from rebels at an encounter outside Kenilworth Castle a few days earlier, and of ambushes or pits, caltrops and nets, all were faced without murmur of protest (although after Courtrai some French sources, with an injured air, tried to explain their defeat as resulting from hidden pits dug by the Flemings). The practicalities of a campaign and battle might mean that it was not practical to spare one's enemies, seeking to hold them for ransom. When, towards the end of the battle of Agincourt in 1415, Henry V ordered the execution of his noble prisoners, neither English nor French commentators condemned him for it, recognizing it as a prudent and necessary act by a commander fearful that they might be freed by a renewed attack by the enemy, rejoin the battle and overwhelm the hard-pressed English army.

The chivalric culture and ethos was without doubt an important and relevant influence on the knight's conduct and behaviour. The apparent contradictions between the Christian concepts of restraint and the protection of the weak and the acquisition of prowess through acts of violence and the needs of war were not apparent to the medieval mind. Despite the playful tone chivalry might sometimes seem to give war for the medieval knight, it was not a game to him. A modern (in actuality Victorian) view of chivalry – fair play, gentility towards women, piety and forbearance – has little in common with the rough-hewn and eminently practical beliefs held by the likes of William Marshal, which accepted death and killing as a necessary aspect of the knight's world.

CHAPTER
FIVE

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD: THE KNIGHT IN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

THE KNIGHT WAS DEFINED BY HIS MARTIAL CALLING. HE WAS identified by his arms, armour and mount, acquiring his status and position by dint of his participation in war and his deeds on the battlefield.

This was not always the case. Not every knight could be a great warrior, and the knight could not for ever be at war. As a man of status, wealth and position, however, he had an equally important position within the social fabric of medieval life.

The development of the knight, and his role within military society, fed almost inevitably into his role and position within the wider political and social system of which he was a part. As has been suggested in the Introduction, the knight at the beginning of the middle ages was of low status, and a distinctive entity from the aristocracy and nobility. He was an armed retainer, a military man in the service of another. Whilst he might possess land, this was not a grant out of which he was expected to provide martial equipment, which was still provided by his lord. Instead, and like early medieval warrior retainers, it was a reward for service and a source of income, received in rents taken from *villeins*, the peasants who actually worked the land. The income of many of these early knights was little more than that earned by the more economically successful peasant. Studies of the Domesday Book, the great survey of lands and rights carried out in England in 1086, have shown that a quarter of the knights listed did not hold land producing sufficient income to sustain a knight. Indeed, whilst the social origins of these early knights are difficult to pin down, and vary according to the region considered, it would appear that most were drawn out of the peasantry in rural areas. In those regions which had urban populations, such as Italy and the Languedoc of southern France and Burgundy, they were drawn out of a group of minor nobility.

Because the term *miles* – 'knight' – defined a role in society rather than a status within the social hierarchy, it meant that men from a wide variety of social, economic and cultural backgrounds became connected by a shared method of fighting and a common experience of warfare. This was not only important for the way in which knighthood became a pan-European phenomenon, but it also enabled the aristocracy to adopt the role of *milites* for themselves. By the middle of the 12th century they had become a militarized aristocracy, a warrior nobility which blurred the distinctions between the nobles or *nobilites* and the *milites*. Those who represented themselves as knights ranged in social rank from kings all the way to household knights who held no land to the German *ministeriales*, the serf-knights who were tied to a lord in much the same way as a peasant might be, unable to marry without their lord's permission or to pass on the property they held to their sons, but with the distinction that they performed their service in arms rather than behind a plough and therefore were considered to some extent noble.

The desire of the nobility to be connected with the role of knighthood was in some ways inevitable. In the fragmented political situation of 11th-century Europe where central authority was weak and local power-struggles and feuds were common, it was increasingly important that the lord be able to lead his men into battle, as well as keep them paid and equipped. Given that his warriors were steeped in a culture that lauded prowess and military might, how was a lord to have their respect and allegiance unless he could prove his own? There was a dignity and status that came from the bearing of arms. The seals of nobles and monarchs of the mid-11th century reflect this, the images of their owners enthroned with the symbols of crown, orb and sceptre being supplanted by depictions of them riding into battle in armour with drawn sword or lance.

It was of course equally desirable for the knight to aspire to the ranks of the aristocracy. By the end of the 12th century knights had begun to adopt some of the trappings of aristocracy. The diffusion of heraldry, with knights adopting individual arms rather than wearing those of their lord, hints at the increasing sense of independence and status. So too does the adoption by the knight of honorific titles such as 'sire' and 'lord' and seals, both once the preserve of princes and magnates. By the 1160s commentators, such as the French writer Andrew the Chaplain, were beginning to conflate the terms 'noble' and 'knight', and the Assize of Clarendon of 1166, which saw a major restructuring of the process of justice in England, distinguished knights as a marked group within society.

There was still, however, a distinction between the noble and the 'common knight'. A nobleman might consider himself and be considered a knight, a warrior capable of fighting on horseback and possessing a hauberk, helm, spear and shield, but this did not mean that every knight was now considered to be noble. The sharing of chivalric values did not necessarily mean a sharing of political interests and it is a common feature of the Anglo-Norman narratives of the mid-12th century that the *milites 'gregarii'*, *'rusticii'* or *'pagenses'*, the common or rural knights, are distinct from and often hostile towards the *milites nobilitatis*, the knights of the nobility.

A further gradation within the ranks of knighthood was the banneret. First and foremost it was a practical military distinction, indicating those knights who led other knights beneath a banner – a rallying point and marker on the field. However it also accrued a social distinction. As early as 1160s the Anglo-Norman writer Wace was able to write in his pseudo-history of the Normans, the *Roman de Rou*, that 'barons had

The seal of Henry II of England. The seal served as a guarantee of the authenticity of a document, but it also served as a vehicle for the promotion of the owner's self-image. (The Art Archive)

banners, knights had pennons'. According to Froissart, Sir Thomas Trivet, whilst on campaign with the Duke of Buckingham in 1380, asked the duke, 'My lord if you please I will this day display my banner; for, thanks to God, I have a sufficient revenue to support the state which a banner requires' and, as we saw above (see p.121), Sir John Chandos was able to lead men beneath a knight's pennant before choosing the auspicious occasion of the battle of Nájera to unfurl his banner and formally adopt the dignity of banneret. In the fiscal terms of the exchequer and royal clerks to be a banneret was to be a superior sort of a knight, receiving a higher rate of pay for one's martial service. By 1300 it is clear that bannerets straddled the divide between the magnates and the knights. Very few of them were considered worthy of their own individual summons to Parliament, which was a honour reserved for the magnates, but almost all were considered ineligible for election to Parliament, which set them above the knight of the shire. This position was to be relatively short lived. By the 15th century the term had disappeared; the upper echelons of the banneret group had become barons whilst the lower sank back into the ranks of the ordinary knight.

The nobility were suspicious and resentful of the knights' taking on the trappings and behaviours of their betters, and it may have been this that led to the increasingly elitist nature of chivalry, in particular the greater ceremony attached to the making of a knight and emphasis on manners and courtesy. The elaboration of knightly culture, and an attendant rise in the cost of maintaining the social trappings of the rank, served to re-draw the dividing line between those who were to be considered knightly by dint of their wealth and social status and those who could fight in full armour and with horse.

Again, the extent to and way in which such changes expressed themselves varied from region to region. The unfree *ministeriales*, for example, remained a part of German elite society well into the 13th century. In southern France the knight remained a military retainer of relatively low status, a professional soldier distinct from the aristocracy. In urban Italy the noble knightly families were often indistinguishable from the non-noble mercantile families whose wealth gave them a status equal to their noble neighbours, in a manner similar to the top levels of the merchant classes in other major cities of Europe.

In England the effect of this fusion of nobility and knighthood was to reduce the numbers of knights. Indeed so bad did the situation get that on several occasions in the mid- to late 13th century the king felt it necessary to compel those who had sufficient property, a 'knight's fee', to take up the rank of knight. Whether this was a purely military necessity (these so-called 'distraints' of knighthood tended to occur during preparations for campaign) or to provide sufficient knights for the administrative functions they were expected to perform, or as a means of raising revenue (defaulters were fined and many appear to have paid for exemptions) is not entirely clear. Nor are the causes of the shortage, which are still much debated, but it appears that the increased cost of the dubbing ceremony and of maintaining the knightly lifestyle priced out some of those at the lower end of the spectrum, whilst a sense of knighthood's exclusivity may have deterred others not wholly sure that their own social origins were illustrious enough. A final disincentive to the adoption of knighthood may have been the weight of duties placed upon knights in terms of bureaucratic office and the administering of justice in the local area.

Despite the distraints, and a reinvigoration of knighthood under Edward III that was the result of his successful campaigns against the Scots and the French and his promotion of chivalric culture, there were a substantial number of men who fell short of the condition of knighthood in some respect. Whilst the banneret came to have the connotation of a man of greater standing than a knight but not as great as a baron, there was no one similar title for those who were of greater standing than other freeholders but were not knighted. As early as 1100 we find French sources distinguishing *chevaliers* (knights) from *serjans* (sergeants) in a military context; the sergeant was a mounted soldier more lightly equipped in terms of armour and riding a lesser quality horse than a knight, but the term also seems to have had some technical meaning too. *Écuyers* and *armigeri* (literally 'shield bearers' or 'arms bearers', squires) referred to a knight's body servant and little more. At some point during the 12th century, however, the term squire began to be used in reference to an apprentice knight. The *History of William Marshal* states that he spent eight years as a squire before being knighted. In the 13th century, however, France has names in the witness lists of charters with the suffix 'armiger' or '*scutifer*' (literally 'shield bearer') and a man might be accorded the honorific of *domicellus*, a diminutive form of *dominus*, 'lord', the honorific attached to the knight. In England the use of the term squire as a social rank appears in about the 14th century, becoming the common term by the middle of that century. Edward III's sumptuary law of 1363, which sought to limit the type, colour and quality of clothing being worn by different ranks of society in order to make the distinctions more clearly defined, has a clear distinction between the cost of cloth allowed the squire and that permitted to the yeoman and other lesser freemen, an obvious sign that the squire was closer to the knight than he was to the ignoble. The Poll Tax of 1379 had a similar demarcation. Like 'knight', the term 'squire' had begun as a title of servitude, but became an honorific, indicating a nobility and standing in society.

POLITICAL AND JUDICIAL FUNCTIONS

Knighthood had always had the connotation of service, but that service was not wholly restricted to wielding lance and sword. The household knight might serve in his lord's *domus*, his civilian household, as well as his *familia*, the military one, especially if the lord was of royal blood. Just as there were the military ranks of marshal and constable, so too were there civilian positions, such as that of the chamberlain, the man who was in overall charge of the civilian household and its finances, or the *seneschal*, who was primarily concerned with the management of servants and the organization of feasting and ceremonial events. Jean de Joinville, the lord who recorded Louis IX's ill-fated crusades into Egypt, was the king's *seneschal*, for example, and clearly a man of no mean estate. Other duties and positions might also be undertaken by those of knightly rank. A wide range of administrative posts fell to the knightly classes, such as foresters, who managed the private hunting parks of the nobility and kings, or local administrators such as the sheriff, *bailli*, or bailiff (the latter the equivalent of the sheriff in northern France, confusingly known as a *seneschal* in the Languedoc region of southern France).

Even if the knight had no specific title or function within the *domus*, that did not mean he had no role to play in its activities. Those present in the household would be asked to bear witness to the documented business of their lords. These witness lists to charters can be an important and informative source in their own right, indicating who was present in a particular court and, because the witnesses are listed in order of precedence, their standing.

In his letter to William V, Count of Aquitaine, describing the duties lords and vassals owed to each other, Bishop Fulbert of Chartres noted that it was the duty of the vassal to support his lord not only in arms but also through *consilium*, his advice. Effectively the vassal might be called upon to offer his opinion on any matter his lord cared to question him on. Amongst the magnates of the realm this was not just a duty but a right. In England the leading barons and the senior churchmen expected to receive a personal summons from the king to attend court (an honour, as we have seen, accorded to some amongst the knights banneret). Their status and honour demanded that their voice be heard. This might explain why the command of medieval armies appears so chaotic and collegiate; the great men were used to being asked and voicing their opinions in court, and saw little to distinguish the court in the comfort of Paris or Westminster from the same body of men in the field in Egypt or northern France.

The lord's *curia*, his court, was part debating chamber and part law court, not only making decisions regarding the running of the lord's demesne but also hearing and deciding upon disputes arising in the lord's lands. These courts ran at all levels from the individual manor right up to the *curia regis*, the king's court, and all performed much the same function but on a larger or smaller scale.

In the *curia regis* the king gathered together many of his direct vassals, the magnates and senior churchmen, to advise him on key decisions concerning the realm, in particular the raising of taxation and finance, and also to rule on cases brought before them, which predominantly concerned disputes over property. Such gatherings were not always passive and increasingly the magnates and clergy came to the *curia* with their own agenda to set before the king.

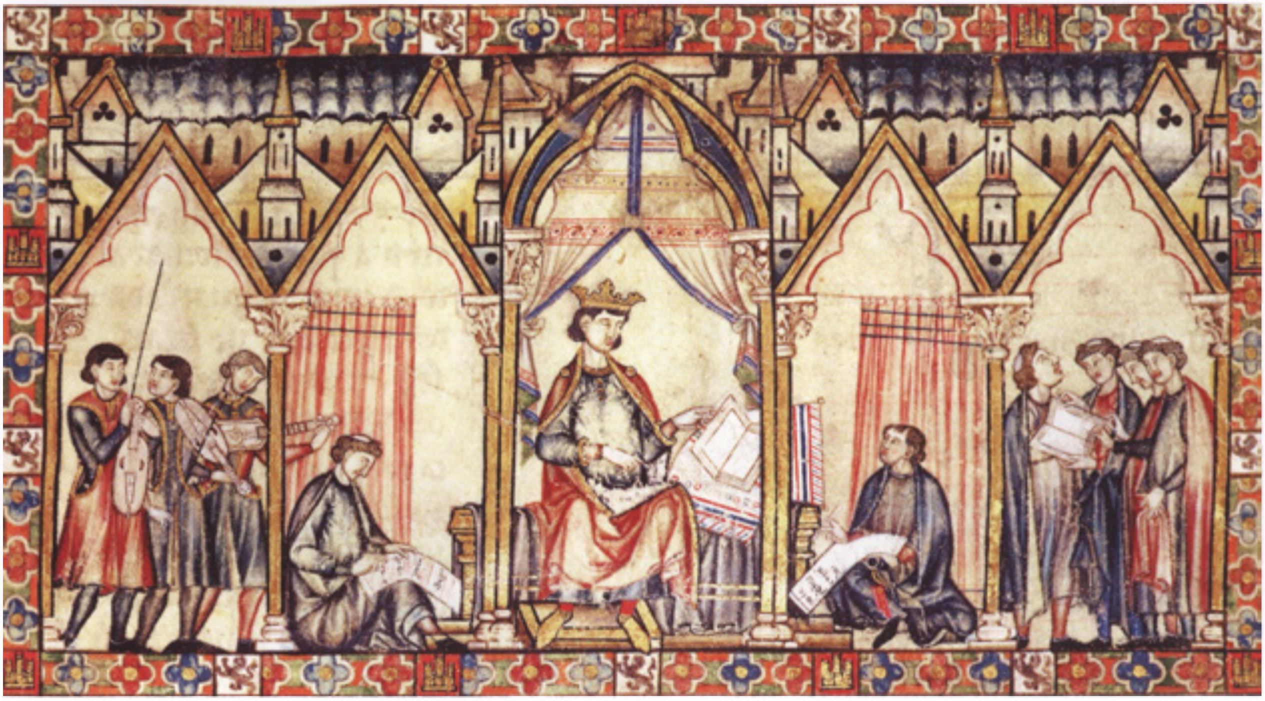
In the 14th century these councils started to be known as *parlements*, recognizing this greater element of discussion and debate. One of the earliest uses of the term is in the Provisions of Oxford, the list of changes imposed upon Henry III of England by Simon de Montfort and several magnates of the so-called Reform movement. It instructed that the king was to meet with his magnate and senior churchmen three times a year to discuss 'the common needs of the realm'. The summons to the parliament of 1295 issued by Edward I to the Earl of Cornwall sums up the concept quite well. It reads:

> Because we wish to have a consultation and meeting with you and with the rest of the principal men of our kingdom, as to provision for remedies against the dangers which in these days are threatening our whole kingdom; we command you, strictly enjoining you in the fidelity and love in which you are bound to us, that on the Lord's day next after the feast of St Martin, in the approaching winter, you be present in person at Westminster, for considering, ordaining and doing along with us and with the prelates, and the rest of the principal men and other inhabitants of our kingdom, as may be necessary for meeting dangers of this kind.

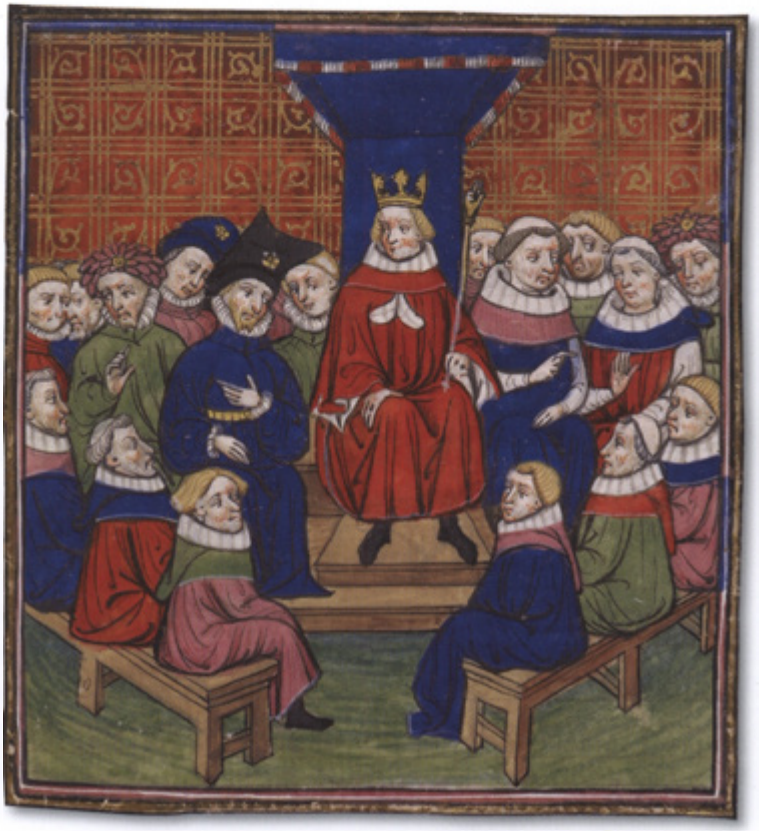
This summons, issued to one of the realm's magnates by name, might be fairly typical but the parliament that the earl was being summoned to was not. For only the second time the great magnates and churchmen who normally attended such meetings were to be joined by representatives of the commons. Each town and city was to select two of their citizens or burgesses, whilst the counties were to be represented by two knights elected, who should be able to speak for the freeholders of their county.

The knight was chosen to represent his county because of the honour and status that came with his rank and calling but also because as a holder of land or office in the county he had an interest in it. The same rationale lay behind his role within the dispensing of justice. Under the restructuring of justice in Henry II's Grand Assize knights took a central role in the running of the legal system. Apart from the sheriff, who as we have noted was invariably a local magnate and who acted as the king's officer and representative in the county, knights served as the electors of and members of juries for a wide variety of property cases, surveying, valuing and judging who had the greater right to disputed land. They were also called upon to serve as coroners, inspecting the scene of a crime and the injuries of a victim and gathering evidence for presentation at trial. They may even have acted as gaolers in that offenders might be remanded into their custody before trial and sentencing. That this multitude of judicial functions was considered burdensome by many is clear from the fact that magnates were exempt from all such duties and that the decline in the number of knights corresponds with the creation of these roles.

Whilst the detail of the structures might be different in other realms, and in fact was different in areas of the English kingdom such as the marcher lordships bordering Wales and the lands of the prince-bishops of Durham, the knight was almost invariably at their heart. Dispensing justice was, after all, one of the chivalric



The royal court was a curious mixture of business and pleasure. Here the king, Alfonso X of Castile and Leon, conducts business with his clerks (who are all tonsured churchmen) whilst in the background minstrels play. (Bridgeman Art Library)



The King of France in *Parlement*, surrounded by his noblemen and bishops. (© British Library)

duties of the knight, and he might feel obliged to do so wherever he came across wrongdoing. The *History of William Marshal* records how the knight met a couple on the road whilst on his way back from pilgrimage to Cologne. The couple turned out to be a monk and the sister of a Flemish nobleman eloping. Determining that they were set in their plans, William asked how they intended to live but, when the monk revealed that they had a purse of money and were going to loan it at profit, committing the grave sin of usury, Marshal confiscated the money and sent them on their way. The tale has something of the medieval romance about it, with William cast in the role of one of Arthur's knights, righting wrongs and preserving the divine order of society. That the money he confiscated was spent on a fine meal for his household and friends during which he told the tale of how he got it, also suggests a less lofty motive behind the act, and reminds us that the knight might equally be seen as little better than a highway robber.

For the knight service was an honour, a right and a burden, both sought out and avoided. It was also an inevitable consequence of his position in society. As a landholder he had the duties and privileges of lordship. As a member of a community of warriors whose ethos focused on concepts of honour, and whose bearing of arms imparted dignity, his word inevitably had greater weight.

LITERACY, LEARNING AND PIETY

Whilst much of the day-to-day administration and bureaucracy of both the manorial and royal courts was conducted by clerks trained for the role in church and grammar schools, monastic communities, universities or within the court itself, the judicial and administrative functions the knight might be found performing also required a degree of literacy and education. Indeed, whilst it is popular to perceive the knight as an ill-educated and uncultured individual interested only in battle and stories of battle, this was far from the truth. A basic knowledge of Latin was probably possessed by the vast majority, if only because of their attendance of Mass at church, and a knowledge of some Latin would have been essential for a knight in the performance of his judicial function. Similarly the ability to read and write in the vernacular (and in England that meant both French and English) was also essential.

When John of Salisbury writes that it was not necessary for a knight to make a declaration at the ceremony of his dubbing because 'who would require such a profession of a man who is illiterate, and who ought to be trained for arms rather than for letters?', he does not mean that the knight was unable to read and write. Instead to be *litteratus* in a medieval context was to be versed in classical Latin literature, to be a scholar. A medieval 'illiterate' might not be classically trained but that did not mean that he was ignorant or ill educated. Throughout this book many of our key sources have been the writings of the knights themselves: Joinville and Villehardouin's crusader narratives, Jean le Bel's account of the Weardale campaign, the poems of Bertrand du Born or the German *Minnesänger*, or Geoffrey de Charny and his *Book of Chivalry*. All are works showing a fine degree of literacy and erudition (even if Bertrand's poems do often emphasize the cruder and more bloodthirsty aspects of the knightly character).

Whilst not all knights would have been capable of such literary achievements their interest in reading went further than the need to be able to comprehend a writ or compile a manorial account. John Trevisa wrote an English translation of Ralph Higden's Latin history the *Polychronicon* in 1387, doing so (Trevisa tells us) because his patron, Thomas Lord Berkeley, knew some Latin but not enough to read the original in full. The knight and nobleman both collected books and read them.

Most of the early vernacular narratives were tales with a distinctive epic character, emphasizing their role as entertainment, and reflecting the tastes of their readership. Wace's two 12th-century works detailing the origins of the Duchy of Normandy and the kingdom of Britain, the *Roman de Rou* and *Roman de Brut*, are both replete with martial detail which would engage a knightly audience. William Marshal's biography, although drawn from sources close to the earl, including his son William and his long-time squire John of Earley, is written in the style of a *chanson de geste*, literally a 'song of deeds', and clearly meant to entertain as well as to praise its subject. The similarity with epic and romance tales is unsurprising. They were all part of a longer tradition of story-telling and although they were now written down, their reading was done aloud as a group activity.

The other works that the nobility collected reflect their broader cultural interests. As well as the expected works on chivalry and heraldry, religious works were very important. From the 12th century the Bible was being translated from Latin, much to the concern of the Church who feared that this would lead to misinterpretation and heresy. Partial translations and selections of stories like the Morgan picture bible, a collection of images depicting key stories of the Old Testament from the Creation to the reign of David, were also popular. From the late 13th century an increasing number of psalters are to be seen in lay hands. These texts, and the similar books of hours that appear in the 14th century, contained a collection of the psalms, prayers, a liturgical calendar recording the key dates within the Church year, and other miscellaneous religious texts, such as excerpts from the Gospels, the litany of the Saints and the Office of the Dead. Like the illustrated bibles, they reflected the laity's desire to incorporate aspects of the clergy's religious practices within their own piety, which was increasingly personal and private.

Such texts were not solely used as a means of worship, they were also texts for study. The knightly class was increasingly intellectually curious. Orderic Vitalis records having discussions about scripture with local knights at his monastery of St Évroult. Two of the largest heretical movements, the Cathar heresy of 13th-century France and the Lollard followers of Wycliffe in 14th- and 15th-century England, were able to flourish through the support of the nobility and knighthood.

It is hard to overestimate just how much a part of life religion was. We have already noted its impact on the chivalric ethos, how the Church tried to direct knightly violence and how the knights might choose to think of the trials of battle and campaign as reflecting the suffering of Christ, but it was also very much a part of their civilian life. Noble families often had strong ties to a particular monastic community, making grants of money or land to it or commissioning chantry chapels, small side-rooms within a church, or even a separate collegiate church where priests could pray for the soul of the donor and their family. Manors and castles invariably had a chapel where the chaplain, another regular member of the noble *domus*, would perform Mass. For the highest ranks of the nobility the chapel might adjoin their private chambers with a separate entrance or a 'squint', a window allowing them to view and participate in the rite without joining the general congregation of the lesser members of their household. Many nobles obtained permission to travel with portable altars so that they could celebrate Mass on campaign. The nobility and knighthood went on pilgrimage; William Marshal was heading back from visiting the Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne when he met the eloping priest and lady, and of course a knight heads up Chaucer's pilgrim band on the road to Canterbury. Not every knight who travelled to the Holy Land did so as part of a crusade. In 1418 the Marshal of Scotland, Sir Robert Keith, had to petition the Pope to be absolved of his pilgrimage vow because although he had vowed and planned many

WILLIAM MARSHAL: THE ARCHETYPAL KNIGHT

A younger son of a minor nobleman who became a notable tourneyer and warrior, a comrade to princes and kings, a powerful landowner and, ultimately, the regent of England and preserver of the Plantagenet dynasty, William Marshal's career perhaps best typifies the breadth of the world of the knight.

Born in 1147, the fourth son of John Marshal, a mid-rank knight from southern England, William was thrust into the political limelight from a very early age. John was holding Newbury Castle for Henry I's daughter Matilda against King Stephen who, in turn, held the infant William hostage. When Stephen threatened to hang him unless John surrendered the castle, the elder Marshal replied that he 'still had the anvils and hammers to produce even finer ones'. Stephen went to carry out his threat but because of the child's naïve innocence he could not bring himself to do so.

At around the age of 12 William was despatched to the continent where he entered the service of William de Tancarville, the Chamberlain of Normandy and a distant relative of his mother, where for eight years he served as a squire and learnt his trade. In 1166 he was knighted, at a time when the conflict between Henry II of England and Louis VII of France offered plenty of opportunities for him to gain experience. William was quick to show his prowess as an individual warrior, being equally successful on the tournament field and battlefield.

In 1168 William entered the household of Henry II's son Henry 'the Young King', where he trained the young prince, who was about five years his junior, in skill at arms. The prince (like Edward of Woodstock, the Black Prince, son of Edward III, two centuries later) was at the heart of tournament and chivalric society, and William's attendance on him could only improve his standing, giving him access to a rarefied circle of high nobility and royal persons. He remained a part of the Young King's household, effectively serving as its commander, although at one point a rift between them caused him to strike out on his own, his own prowess driving him forwards. At the Young King's death in 1183 William was firmly established and had a following of his own.

William undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, completing the vow originally made by the Young King before he was taken ill. He returned to enter the service of Henry II and, on the king's death, that of his son Richard. In 1189 he married Isabel de Clare, heiress to Richard de Clare, known as 'Strongbow', Earl of Clare and Lord of Striguil, gaining lands in Wales, Ireland, Normandy and England by the marriage and becoming one of the foremost magnates of the land.

William was one of the lords to oppose John's attempt to seize power from his brother whilst Richard was on crusade, but once the former became king in 1199 William stood loyally by him throughout his reign, one of the few barons to do so. When John died in 1216, he entrusted William with the task of ensuring that his son, the nine-year-old Henry III, took the throne, and the Marshal was appointed regent. He defeated the French army under Prince Louis that had been invited in by rebel barons to overthrow John, taking the field at the age of 70. Showing a statesmanship that ensured a rapid

More than a mere warrior, the image given by his effgy, William Marshal had been the teacher, protector and confidante of kings and princes. (Bridgeman Art Library)

and stable peace in which his charge could grow up, William negotiated a settlement with Louis and the rebels, and re-established Magna Carta, the collection of rights and privileges imposed on John by the barons in 1215.

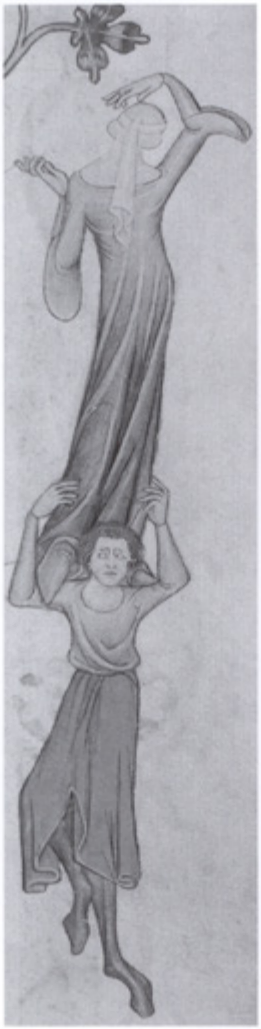
Marshal fell ill in March 1219 and, entering the Order of the Knights Templar, he made his final arrangements. He distributed his clothing between the knights of his household and the poor, confessed his sins and died. He was buried in the New Temple church, where his effigy can still be seen today. The news of his death travelled across the Channel and he was mourned by the King of France and his court as the most loyal, wise and best knight of his age.

Earl William, his son, commissioned a history of his life to be written, thus securing William's place in history, couched in a suitably epic tone for one who had been at the heart of chivalry for so long.

times 'in the days of his youth' to go to the Holy Sepulchre his office and duties had never given him leave to do so and, being now in his seventies, he was no longer able to travel so far. The Pope gave him the absolution he sought providing that Sir Robert made financial donations to his preferred churches equal to the amount he would have spent travelling to the Holy Land, a not insubstantial sum.

Even in its piety, however, knighthood did not forget either its status or its calling. The buildings created by the donations of knightly families were invariably decorated with their heraldry, and their effigies, clad in the armour that marked them as warriors, often dominated the chapels they had commissioned for the repose of their souls. In the second inventory of goods and chattels left at Wigmore Castle and the nearby monastery, taken by the officers of Edward II in 1324 after the failed rebellion of its owner Roger Mortimer, there was a substantial collection of religious and liturgical items, including two psalters, of which one was partly in French, a portable altar 'of marble' (which might make one question how portable it actually was), several boxes for the Eucharist, and crucifixes and images of the Virgin Mary and saints in wood and ivory. There were also several sets of priests' vestments and altar cloths, including one decorated with the Mortimer arms, another with those of Joinville – the arms of Roger's wife's family – and a third bearing the arms of Gloucester, Hereford and Ferrers (other key local magnates in the region), showing the desire of noble families to display their political connections in as public a way as possible, even in the House of God.

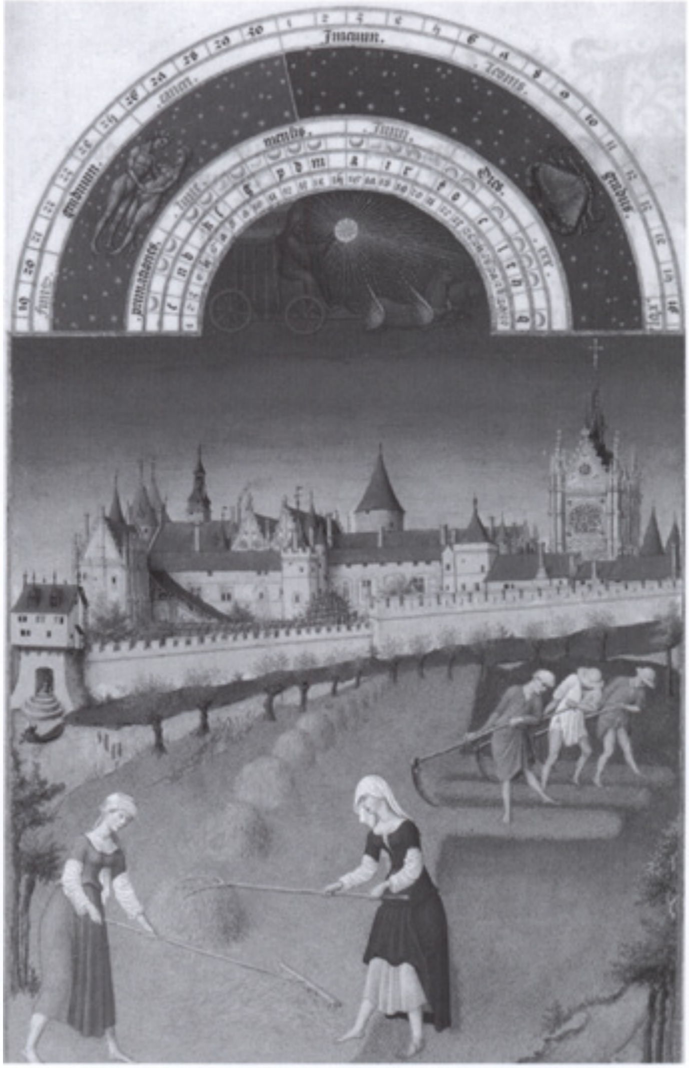
In the same way, books were more than vehicles for learning. They were labour-intensive, high-value items. The finest of them, such as the Morgan picture bible or the Luttrell psalter, were large in size and lavishly illustrated. Each was as much a symbol of status as it was a practical text, something to be displayed to guests and enjoyed as art in itself. The Luttrell psalter is dominated by the image of Sir Geoffrey Luttrell, his wife and daughter-in-law, a statement of the power and social position he held. It is littered with images of the life of the noble and his estate, from feasting to ploughing, and with images amusing and ludicrous.



Devotional works were not all serious. As in the Luttrell psalter (shown here), illustrators might include all manner of humorous elements on the margins of their works, like these acrobats. (Bridgeman Art Library)

The same is true for the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, a 15th-century book of hours exquisitely illustrated by the Limbourg brothers from Nijmegen. The main section, a liturgical calendar incorporating key festivals, saints' days and the signs of the zodiac, also has a series of incredibly fine and detailed landscapes depicting a chateau and its estates during the month in question. The illustrations serve no practical purpose; they can only have been intended to entertain and to be marvelled at.

The same was true of the many practical texts that we find amongst the collections of knights. Books on animal husbandry, estate management and hunting were increasingly common, but this reflects a greater interest in books and a desire to make an outward show of knowledge and learning, rather than suggesting that knights and nobles were becoming less able in these fields and needed how-to manuals. Often such texts were bound together so that a translation of a classical text on grammar might lie between a bestiary describing rare and strange beasts and a saint's life. Sometimes the owner of the book might also be its compiler. The expense of owning a book made it normal to view and copy texts from the collection of a local abbey or a neighbour. Commonplace books or *zibaldone*, 'hotchpotch books' as they were known in Italy, could contain a bewildering variety of subjects, copied down by individuals as they came across them and found them important or merely interesting. One 15th-century example contains everything from word puzzles to the 'fifteen signs before Domesday', to legal forms of charters and bonds, to copies of accounts and bills from the estate. Literacy and learning were far from unknown to the knight.



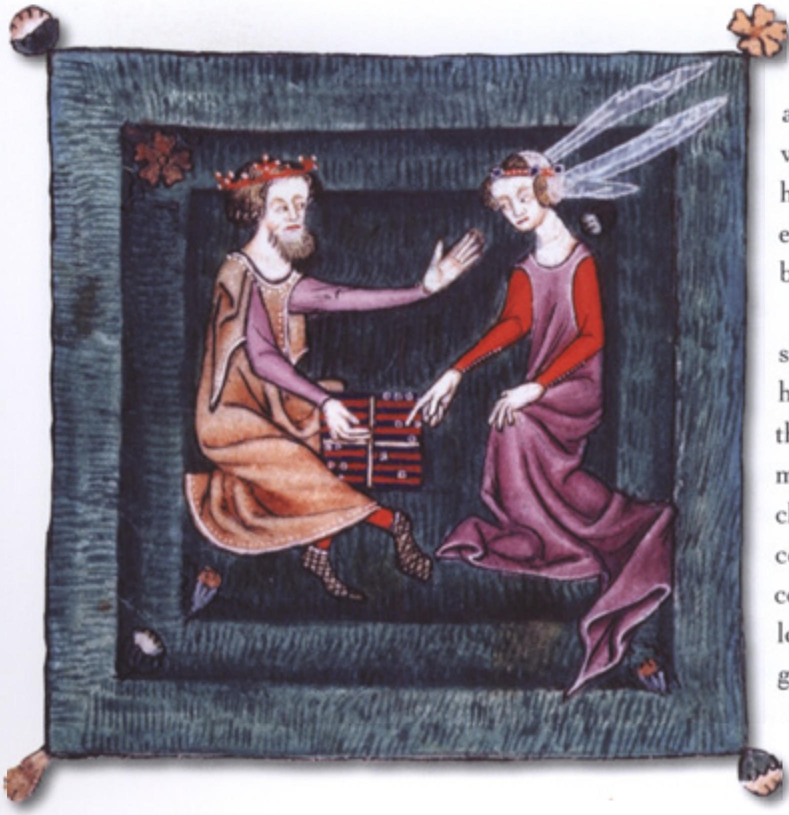
Despite their exquisite workmanship, and the pastoral scenes, with the lord's castle ever in the background, psalters like the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* were also practical devotional books, providing the owner with a calendar to chart the festivals and observances of the Church. (Bridgeman Art Library)

CLOTHING, JEWELLERY AND CHATTELS

The collection of books was a symbol of wealth and status, a mark of the nobility in the same way as arms, armour and horse. So too were the other objects that adorned a medieval knight's residence or, on campaign, pavilion. These objects, like the subject matter of their books, reflect the interests of their owners. Survivals are rare: textiles were re-used and re-cut, precious metals melted down and fashioned into new items. However, inventories, such as that taken of Wigmore, give some indications of the sorts of things that were in the households of the nobility. There are substantial amounts of bed hangings and tapestries, in a variety of colours, patterns and designs, including a few with the arms of Roger Mortimer and his wife, again ensuring that the families were symbolically represented throughout the house.

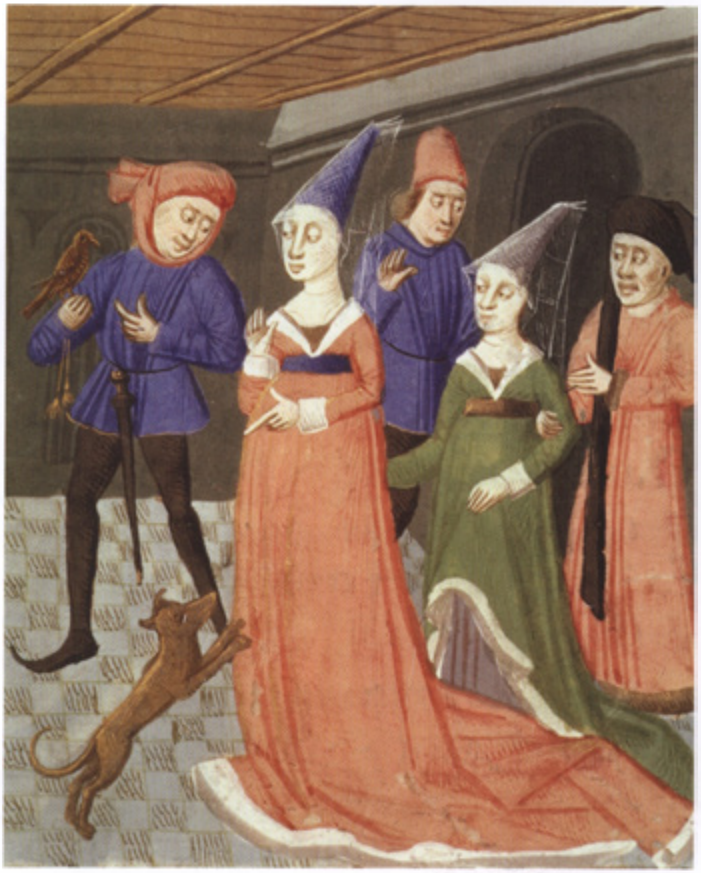
Another notable inclusion in the inventory are gaming boards for backgammon and chess; indeed four different chess boards are recorded. Chess was a popular and acceptable game for the medieval noble to play. A large number of treatises on the game were produced including one by the English writer Alexander Neckham in around 1180. The 13th-century Italian Jacobus de Cessolis in his 'Book of the customs of men and the duties of nobles, or the Book of Chess' gave the game as the basis for a series of sermons on morality – a clear indicator that the game was popular and familiar to his audience.

Also recorded are a number of pieces of silver and wooden tableware, including goblets, mazers, ewers and plates, but not really enough to cover the four tables (one of which was warped). Indeed the inventory is somewhat disappointing in this respect. There is about it more of the rummage sale than the household of a leading nobleman. Royal officials had to return on two further occasions to re-list the items because locals had been making off with items or selling livestock without the royal court's permission, and between the visits some material had already been redistributed to the king, the abbey or the family. It is always possible that some items had been 'misplaced' at some point between Roger's flight and the arrival of the royal clerks. The number of coffers and chests that appear are also a reminder that the nobility was still very much an itinerant one, the entire household moving between their various estates, taking many of their goods and belongings with them.



Games like chess and backgammon were very popular pastimes amongst the nobility and knighthood, although here the gesture of the king, and the fly-away veil of the lady, are suggestive of impropriety. (Bridgeman Art Library)

One of the most obvious indicators of the status and position of the individual was his or her clothing. Even more than in modern times, the cut, colour and cloth of the garments worn made a statement about who you were. Men's clothing between the late 11th and the late 13th centuries remained generally unchanged. It comprised a knee-length shirt, *braies* (a pair of loose underpants) *chausses* (stocking-like garments for the legs held up by being tied to the waist of the *braies*) and a loose-fitting tunic or gown to cover the body. The head



Ladies and their servants in the dress of the mid-14th century. It was the short doublets, long shoes and chaperons that caused complaint about the new fashions. (The Art Archive)

was uncovered at first, with a cap being seen in the 12th century, often brimless and forward pointing in the Phrygian style of classical Greece. During the 13th century coifs also came into fashion as a head covering. Over-tunics or gowns, cloaks and hoods were also worn. During the 14th century things changed quite dramatically. A hip-length, tight-fitting jacket replaced the under-tunic, appearing in various forms under a variety of names – doublet, *jupon*, *cotehardie*, *pourpoint* – to which the chausses now attached by cords called points. The gown similarly became tight fitting and after around 1340 it might be dispensed with, in which case the tight-fitting tunic became the outer garment. During the late 14th and 15th centuries the doublet become increasingly short, being barely waist-length by the end of the 15th century, and the chausses increased in length to compensate, the separate legs eventually joining in order to cover the buttocks and groin. Gowns took on a fuller fashion again, in the very late 14th century being loose fitting with long, excessively full sleeves and known as the *houpelonde*, and then developing into something more akin to a modern coat, albeit with a pleated skirt. Headgear also developed in this century. Alongside various forms of cap, the hood, an ubiquitous covering in the 14th century, got smaller and more tight-fitting until, no longer able to fit over the head of the wearer it was wrapped around it as a kind of hat, known as a *chaperon*.

Fashion, such as it was in medieval times, is normally marked in the narrative sources by opposition, taking the form of complaints about lewdness and impropriety, or vanity and opulence. Thus Orderic Vitalis tells how the courtiers of William Rufus, William the Conqueror's son and heir to the English throne, were not the men their fathers had been – 'On these days the old customs have almost wholly given way to new fads.' He writes:

> Our wanton youth is sunk in effeminacy, and courtiers, fawning, seek the favours of women with every kind of lewdness. They add excrescences like serpents' tales [sic] to

> the tips of their toes where the body ends, and gaze with admiration on these scorpion-like shapes. They sweep the dusty ground with the unnecessary trains of their robes and mantles; their long, wide sleeves cover their hands whatever they do; impeded by these frivolities they are almost incapable of walking quickly or doing any kind of useful work... They curl their hair with hot irons and cover their heads with a fillet or a cap.

Later, after Rufus' death and his brother Henry's accession to the throne, Orderic recounts how Bishop Serlo of Seez preached against the long hair of the courtiers saying:

> All of you wear your hair in woman's fashion, which is not seemly for you who are made in the image of God and ought to use your strength like men. Paul the apostle, who was a chosen vessel and teacher of the Gentiles, showed how unseemly and detestable it is for men to have curly locks... The perverse sons of Belial grow the tresses of women on their heads... Many imitate these utterly depraved fashions, not realizing how much evil is in the long tresses of which they boast. So, glorious king, I beg of you to set a praiseworthy example to your subjects; let them see first in you how they ought to prepare themselves.

He then produced a pair of shears and cut short the hair of the king and his *familia*.

Long-toed shoes are a recurring motif in the complaints about new fashions. In the 1340s fashion once again took a major turn, and many writers expressed their disquiet at the new styles. The Italian writer Giovanni Villani (who had begun the chronicle continued by his nephew Filippo) and the Englishman John of Reading, the writer of the *Grandes Chroniques de France* (the official chronicle of the French crown) even Geoffrey de Charny, all decry the same changes: clothing so tight that men were unable to dress themselves and found it difficult to move, even to kneel in prayer. Tunics and doublets were so short that they exposed their loins. John of Reading says that 'they wear shoes with beaks in front as long as your finger, called *cracowes*, more suitable as the claws of devils than as the apparel of men'. Hair too caused concern again, particularly beards. Villani and a number of other Italian writers note that along with the tight clothes and grotesquely long shoes, the fashionable young men had also adopted beards in order to make themselves look fearsome.

Another regular complaint on the part of churchmen, and an unsurprising one, perhaps, was that men were too fond of decoration and ornamentation. Bernard of Clairvaux's praise of the Knights Templar focuses as much on their simplicity of lifestyle compared to the vainglorious pomp of the secular knighthood, and such remarks are common ones. Raymon Lull and Geoffrey de Charny both say that the knight should be well dressed. Charny, however, warns the young knight that though it is right to look elegantly and fashionably dressed, he should be careful not to become so devoted to his appearance that he neglects his chivalric duty or forgets God. The same sort of thing is said by other laypersons. Many commentators decry the luxurious embroidery and decoration of the new fashions of the 1340s, encrusted with pearls and precious stones and cinched with ornately worked belts from which hung purses and daggers. One French chronicler of the 1350s notes that the French nobility had become so fond of pearls that their price had risen drastically, and there does appear to have been a shortage at that time: French royal accounts for 1351 show that a piece of pearl embroidery for a dress for the Queen of France could not be completed because not enough pearls could be found.

The French poet Machaut wrote in 1358 deploring the habit of the higher nobility of dressing too simply, so that they appeared no better dressed than those who served them. He argued that whilst the king and princes should be distinctive in their dress, and wear clothes and adornment as befitted their station, those who served in their household should all look alike, and be dressed in livery. Although it is common to think of livery as being the uniform of servants, merchant guilds and footsoldiers, in fact it was part of the duty of every lord to provide some form of livery to those in service. This could take any form of support, whether it be food, drink, shelter or, 'liveries of robes'. This comprised clothing, or more usually the cloth for the clothing to be cut from, which was given out prior to major religious festivals and household knights received it in the same way as the foresters, butlers, henchmen and other members of the *domus*.

The status of the household knight was marked out, sometimes by the colour but more often by the quality and amount of the cloth and lining to be used for making the suit. The knights serving in Edward III's chamber received the same tan striped cloth for their livery as the other servants, except they received a greater amount of cloth, allowing for the greater waste entailed in the new more tailored fashions or for longer gowns, and lining furs of *gros vair* and *bishe* (two different types of squirrel pelt) rather than the white lamb given to the squires of the chamber. The *domus* of kings, princes and nobles would have seemed at first glance to be uniform in their dress, but on closer inspection the finer distinctions would have become clear.

The knight was to be found in other liveries. The secular chivalric orders all had specific liveries to be worn at their feasts and convocations; the Order of the Garter's appears to have consisted of a blue robe decorated with the emblem of the garter whilst the Order of the Golden Fleece wore red-lined white.

Such liveries were for key festivals and ceremonies. At other times the knight might wear what he liked. Whilst the sumptuary laws that appeared at various times might

DOYEN OF CHIVALRY: THE BLACK PRINCE

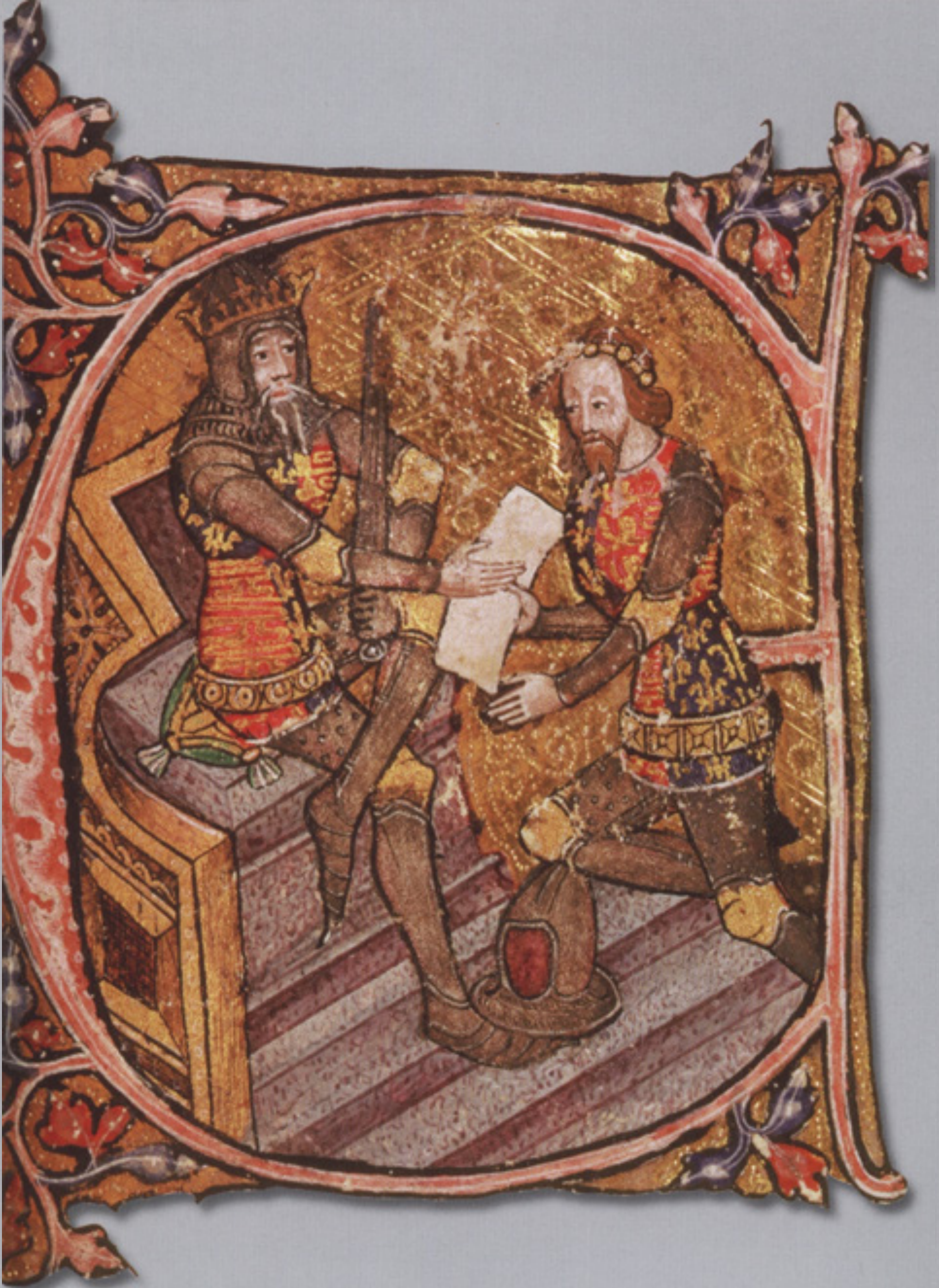
The Black Prince's reputation as a chivalric and perfect knight was built early and survived long after his death. As he was Edward III's eldest son, the heir to the nation and to his father's pretensions to the crown of France, it could hardly do otherwise. Like Henry the Young King, Henry II's eldest son, he had resources that enabled him to play the chivalric hero to the utmost. Like the Young King, he was to die whilst his reputation was at its height, before time and the inevitable reverses and pressures of kingship could sully it.

The Prince's military reputation was earned in a very few engagements, although it should be remembered that few men could boast of participating in three pitched battles, particularly in a life so short as his. The Hundred Years War battle of Crécy set his reputation in 1346, although the prince's command here, aged but 16, may have been something of a fiction: Edward III's injunction to 'let the boy win his spurs' did not prevent him from putting the prince alongside three of the most experienced commanders in the realm. It was confirmed at Poitiers, in the same conflict, in 1356, when the prince's heavily outnumbered army defeated and captured the French king Jean II. Nájera in 1367, during his intervention in the Castilian civil war that saw the capture of the French commander Bertrand du Guesclin, set it in stone.

The tactics with which these battles were won, combining dismounted men-at-arms with large numbers of archers, were well established, having been developed and refined in numerous engagements in Scotland and France since Dupplin Moor in 1332. Likewise the raid, or *chévauchée*, was also a long-standing strategy. The prince may have made it his own, and shown a good tactical sense – Poitiers proving he had a good eye for ground and the ability to command – but he showed no sign of, indeed had no need for, an innovative approach to military affairs.

The chivalry of the prince is undeniable. His treatment of Jean II after Poitiers is a regularly held up as an example of high chivalry. In the evening after the battle the prince has a lavish meal prepared and 'served before the king as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board for any desire that the king could make, but he said he was not sufficient to sit at table with so great a prince'. The prince was, like his father, a great lover of pageantry and tournament. It is no surprise that he was a founder member of the Order of the Garter. Both father and son regularly appeared together, taking on the disguise of the knight *incognito* or the role of Arthurian heroes. He spent lavishly on such events. The celebrations and tournament organized to celebrate the birth of his son Richard lasted ten days and over 900 knights and noblemen attended the festivities.

Politically his career was less shining. As Prince of Aquitaine and Wales he was a king in all but name. The prince had a clear sense of his royal personage and the deference due him. He was also politically naïve, perhaps inevitably in his short life dominated by the relatively simple matters of battle and tournament. His desire to make use of the fullest extent of his authority, both in order to fund his chivalric court and as a statement of his royal power, led to a great deal of friction with a nobility long used to a considerable autonomy and themselves jealous of their status. For them the prince's administration had an air of tyranny about it.

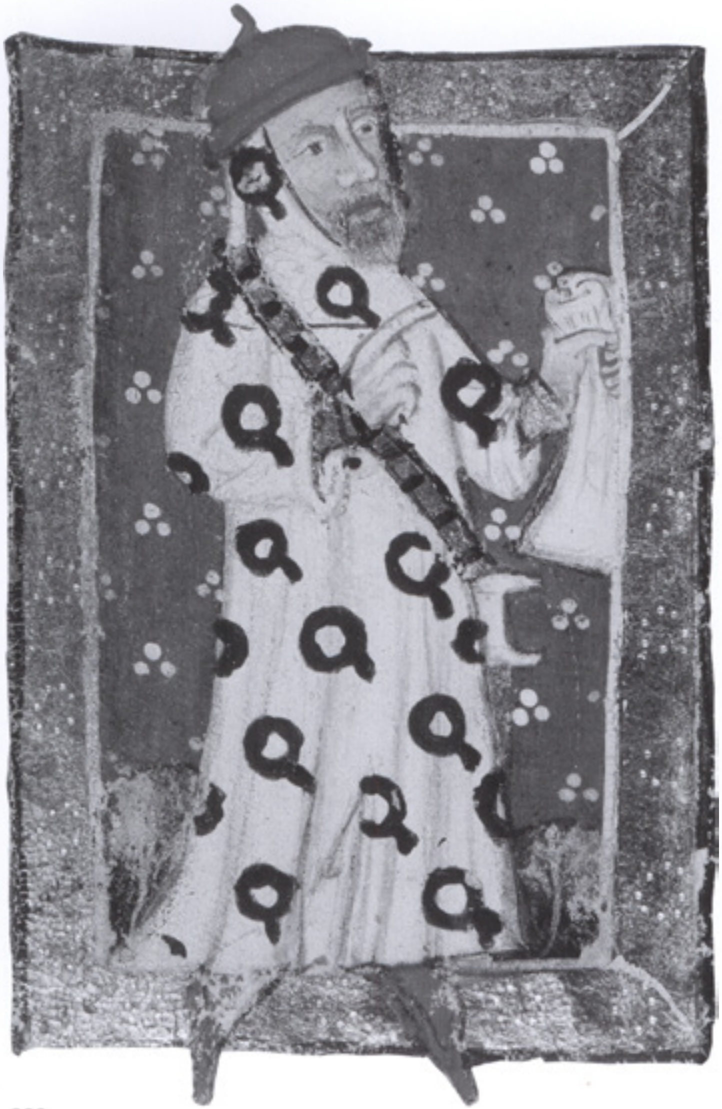


The Black Prince receives control of Aquitaine from his father Edward III. They are depicted in armour, reflecting their position as war leaders and warriors. (Bridgeman Art Library)

The death of the Black Prince in 1376, at the age of 46, brought to an end the chivalric dream. Contemporaries certainly saw it so, claiming that with his death 'the hopes of the English utterly perished'. With his death the crown of England was to pass from Edward III, who shared his son's reputation as a chivalric and military king, to the prince's son Richard II. Ascending the throne at ten, and never the warrior that his father and grandfather had been, it was inevitable that when compared to such illustrious predecessors he should be found wanting.

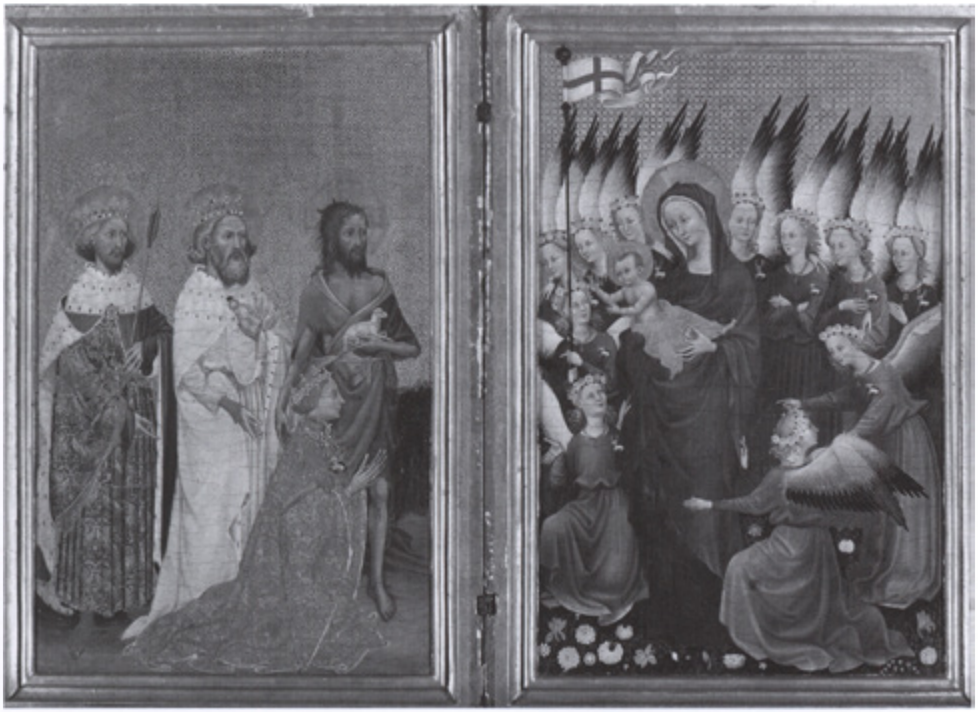
well legislate for him, and place him in a particular stratum of society, they were primarily aimed at ensuring that the ignoble but wealthy were distinctively less well dressed in terms of colour, cloth, decoration and fur linings than their noble and therefore social superiors.

Even when not wearing the full liveries that marked their membership of an Order, members were expected to wear that Order's badge as a display of their membership. Badges were common wear, being worn as souvenirs of visits to saints' shrines, as keepsakes and love tokens but also, more importantly, as *devises* denoting political and social affiliations. Such badges worked alongside heraldic display on the battlefield and in society in general from an early period. One of the earliest of these *cognizances* was the broom pod (*planta genista* in Latin) used by the Plantagenets, from which the dynasty's sobriquet was derived. The myth of its origin states that the badge came into use because Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou and father of Henry II of England, had the habit of wearing a sprig of broom in his hat when he went out hunting. This badge remained with the Plantagenets into the late 14th century and is to be seen around the neck of Richard II in his portrait in the Wilton diptych. The importance of such badges is shown by the fact that in the other leaf of the altarpiece the angels attending the Virgin and child are wearing the same badge, and both they and Richard also wear the king's own badge of a white stag. Thus Richard is displaying his piety and humility in his kneeling before Christ, but also the divine nature of his authority by having the heavenly host wear the badges of himself and his dynasty.



The secular orders each had their own robe, like this one worn by the Garter knight Nigel Lorning. They were, however, for particular occasions and normally only the Order's badge would be worn. (Bridgeman Art Library)

During times of political instability, such as the struggle between the Armagnac and Burgundian parties for control of the French throne in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, or in England under Richard II and again during the Wars of the Roses, the wearing of such badges became emblematic



The Wilton diptych is a marvel of medieval propaganda. A travelling altarpiece made for Richard II, it deftly shows him submissive to Christ and the Virgin Mary and, at the same time, suggests something divine in his nature through the angels' wearing of his and the Plantagenet badges. (Bridgeman Art Library)

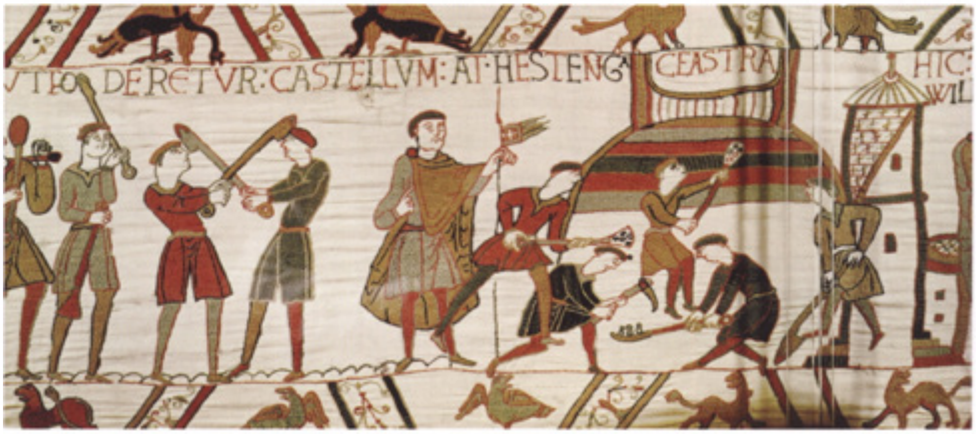
of the factionalism present and the power of the individual lords. In May 1390 Richard II published an ordinance in an attempt to limit what it called 'liveries of company' since the badges were being distributed too freely, so that hirelings as well as indentured retainers and household servants were wearing them and they were being used to create what amounted to private armies of ruffians and thugs to intimidate the lord's weaker neighbours and opponents. As the Parliament of 1388 put it in its call for the abolition of the badge altogether, 'those who wear them are flown with such insolent arrogance that they do not shrink from practising with reckless effrontery various kinds of extortion in the surrounding countryside ... and it is certainly the boldness inspired by these badges that makes them unafraid to do these things'. Richard's ordinance stated that only those of the rank of banneret or above might issue them and only those above the rank of esquire might wear them. An ordinance of Henry VII, after the protracted conflict of the Wars of the Roses, in which almost every knight and nobleman had his livery colours and badge and which were characterized by armed conflict between the liveried retinues of the great lords, endeavoured to restrict the issuing of livery badges to the king, and the wearing of liveries to the immediate household servants of the nobility.

THE HOME OF THE KNIGHT: CASTLE AND MANOR

Knights and castles are an inseparable feature of the image of the middle ages. From childhood everyone knows that knights live in castles. In the same way that the popular understanding of the knight is dominated by his role as a warrior, so too the castle is traditionally seen as being a structure designed for one purpose, defence.

There is some truth in this. The development of what we would recognize as a castle came about because of the circumstances of 11th-century politics and warfare. The small-scale conflicts between lordships put an emphasis on rapid attacks on enemies for limited gains. Forces were relatively small and the need for a refuge for the lord and his retainers important. 'Because they were not all lords of castles,' writes one 11th-century chronicler of the nobility in the French county of Ponthieu, 'Hugh of Abbeville became more powerful than the rest of his peers. For he could do what he liked without fear, relying on the protection of his castle, while others, if they tried anything, were easily overcome since they had no refuge.' Waleran of Therouanne, writing in the early 12th century, offers a similar rationale, but a clearer description:

> For it is the habit of the magnates and nobles of those parts, who spend most of their time fighting and slaughtering their enemies, in order thus to be safer from their opponents and with greater power to either vanquish their equals or suppress their inferiors, to rise a mound of earth as high as they possibly can and surround it with a ditch as deep and broad as possible. The top of this mound they completely enclose with a palisade… In the middle of the space, within the palisade, they build a residence, or, dominating everything, a keep.



The motte and bailey castle built by the Normans on landing at Pevensey was constructed using prefabricated sections that they had shipped across with the invading army. (Bridgeman Art Library)

From its very earliest days, then, the castle was designed as a form of defence, a shelter for the lord and his retinue and a means of securing control of a region. On his landing at Pevensey in 1066, William's first act was to have a castle built, and from his victory at Hastings a rash of motte and bailey castles spread across the land as the incoming Norman lords took hold of their new possessions and stamped their authority on them.

Castles continued to be an essential and regular aspect of medieval warfare. As we have suggested above, sieges were more prevalent than pitched battles and the campaign strategies of medieval generals invariably had to take into account the location and strength of fortifications, both castle and walled town. In border regions, such as along the Welsh and Scottish March or in the Vexin, the debatable land between the Duchy of Normandy and the French royal lands of the Île de France, and in the minor and factional lordships of the Low Countries and Rhine valleys, castles proliferated. Some remained little more than temporary timber structures like the motte and baileys hastily thrown up by William's forces, designed to act as refuges against raiders and bases from which a small garrison might harass their lines, whilst others grew in size and complexity, their timber palisades being replaced by stone walls and their tower-topped mottes replaced by massive keeps like the White Tower in London or the great keep at Rochester.

These grander structures were more than military refuges, however, and their design and architecture was not wholly focused on the needs of defence and the threat of the siege. The castle served as a political and administrative base for the king, baron or lord. It provided a residence for him and his household, on a more or less permanent basis, and served as the *caput* or head of his lordship. It was in the castle that the manorial and shire courts were held, where dues and taxes were delivered and paid, where complaints were brought and justice delivered. The architecture of the castle inevitably reflected these functions.

The size of the castle and the complexity of its defences were as much about projecting an image of the power and strength of its owner as they were about defending that owner from attack. The castles that Edward I caused to be built after his campaigns and subjugation of the Welsh were not just bases from which his garrisons could prevent a resurgence of the Welsh princes, or bases from which to launch further campaigns. In their scale and grandeur, they were statements of his power and royal authority. Caernarfon Castle's walls were built with great angled towers and banded stonework that mimicked that of the walls of Constantinople and reflected that city's symbolism of imperial and ancient power.

A complex series of gateways winding up towards the keep might well make for a defence in depth, channelling an attacker through a series of kill-zones and under murder holes and arrow slits. Equally, however, it took the petitioner on a procession through a powerful symbol of military might and conspicuous consumption, reminding him how small he was and how great, wealthy and powerful the man he had come to bother with his request. Those entering the great tower at the castle of Hedingham in Essex had this experience. Built by the first Earl of Oxford around 1140, it comprised three stories: a basement, a lower hall which was the main entrance, and a high-ceilinged upper hall topped with a gallery looking down into it and out over the courtyard. There are no indications of domestic chambers, such as a pantry, sleeping quarters or kitchens, and thus it seems to have served a solely ceremonial function. The visitor climbed a staircase to the ornate doorway, and entered the lower chamber, where perhaps one of the earl's officials, who had control of the door to the upper room, would have waited to meet him. The staircase that those permitted access would have climbed was angled so that as they did so the earl, seated next to the large fireplace, would have steadily come into view, always above the visitor and bathed in light from the large windows in the gallery above. The gallery would also have allowed the members of the earl's household and family to watch these ceremonial occasions, the witnessing of such events being as important as the events themselves.

Just as not all castles were small and simple defensive strongholds, nor were all castles only administrative offices and projections of power. They were also aristocratic residences, the homes of the social elite, who needed places to sleep and eat and areas for personal privacy. Within the enceinte of the castle wall would have been a wide variety of domestic buildings: pantries, kitchens and bake houses, stables, lodgings for guests and the members of the household, dovecots, cisterns and well-rooms for the water supply.

There was a clear distinction between the public space and the private. Initially the *camera*, the lord's chamber, containing his private rooms, was likely to be a separate building entirely, connected to the *aula*, the hall, by a passage or merely a covered walk. By the middle of the 13th century, however, it was far more common to see the two rooms as part of the same building. At the lower end of the hall were the main entrance and the service rooms – the kitchens, cellar and *spense* (the dispensary, which held the tableware and linen) – these screened off from the hall itself by wooden panelling. The camera was at the upper end of the hall, with access for the lord and his *familia*. The main chamber of these private rooms was the *solar*. It derived its name not from the Latin *sol* for the sun, despite the fact that many of these rooms, particularly in the 14th century, had large windows, but from the word *seul* or 'alone'. It was a withdrawing room where the lord, his family and honoured guests might retire away from the communal and public area of the great hall.

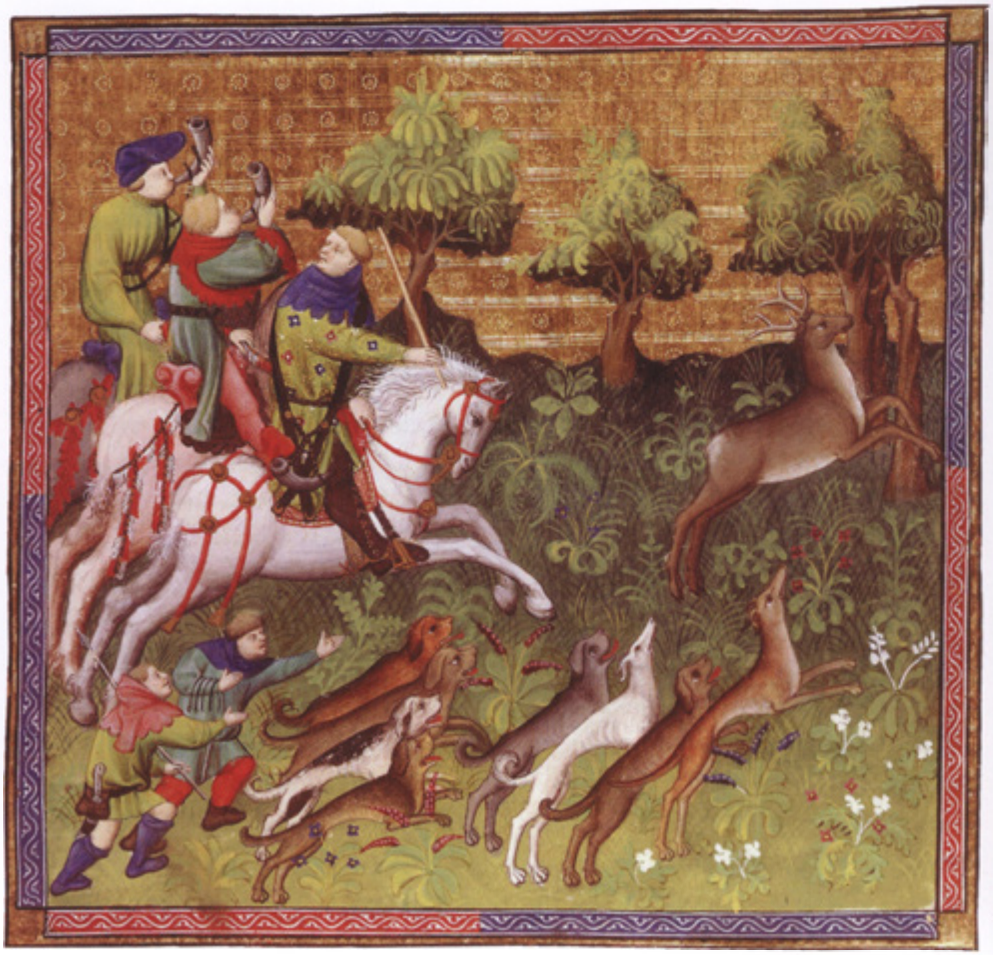
The grander the castle, the more complex would be the juxtaposition and layout of the administrative, ceremonial and private spaces. Royal castles like Portchester Castle might even have a separate range with the apartments for the royal household's visits.

Whatever the size of the dwelling, the layout seems to have been much the same. When the manor at Chingford in Essex was granted to Robert Le Moyne by the Chapter of Westminster Abbey in 1265 it was described in detail:

> ... a sufficient and handsome hall well ceiled with oak. On the western side is a worthy bed, on the ground, a stone chimney, a wardrobe and a certain other small chamber; at the eastern end is a pantry and a buttery. Between the hall and the chapel is a side-room. There is a decent chapel covered with tiles, a portable altar and a small cross. In the hall are four tables on trestles. There are likewise a good kitchen well covered with tiles, with a furnace and ovens, one large the other small for cakes, two tables, and alongside the kitchen a small house for baking. Also a new granary covered with oak shingles and a building in which the dairy is contained, though it is divided. Likewise a chamber suitable for clergyman and an inner chamber. Also a henhouse. These are within the inner gate.
>
> Likewise outside of that gate are an old house for the servants, a good stable, long and divided, and to the east of the principal building, beyond the smaller stable, a solar for the use of the servants. Also a building in which is contained a bed; also two barns, one for wheat and one for oats. These buildings are enclosed with a moat, a wall, and a hedge. Also beyond the middle gate is a good barn, and a stable of cows and another for oxen, these old and ruinous. Also beyond the outer gate is a pigsty.

This was not a castle, indeed it appears little bigger than a modern farm. It did, however, have its chapel and hall and was surrounded by a moat and an enclosure wall with a gatehouse. Even when a nobleman did not reside in a castle the image of martial power that the castle represented was important and manor houses, like that at Chingford, which were primarily residences would still sport crenellated walls and gatehouses that suggested defensive power even if the walls were thin and the gatehouses were built more as guest houses than as a way of keeping enemies out. The majority of 'licences to crenellate', permissions bought from the Crown to build a fortified structure, were granted to minor nobility and knights for buildings that were never serious fortifications. After all any man with the resources to build a serious fortress would not need such permission, as the rash of castle building at times of weak royal government shows. A house, no matter how humble, was of greater standing if it was topped with the machicolations of a castle wall and fronted by a gate house. They were symbols of nobility and knighthood.

The lord's lands and interests stretched out beyond the castle walls. The castle or manor sat within a carefully structured and managed landscape. Some of this was purely practical, consisting of the agricultural land of the estate. Other parts were purely for the pleasure of the residents of the castle. Walled formal gardens were a common feature, although often lost to us now. The design of the castle and the estate around it was no less carefully done than the work of Capability Brown, with the windows of the camera and solar being positioned to give structured views of the surrounding landscape and private stairs giving access to rooftop or wall walks. Like the managed parks of 18th-century country houses, the landscape beyond was graded from the formal gardens close to the house through 'little parks' and on to the informal 'wild' land of park and forest beyond. At Okehampton in Devon, the 14th-century rebuilding of the domestic range faced south, with large windows looking out onto a newly enclosed deer park and chase, from which all habitation seems to have been removed and the boundary of which sat just beyond the horizon, so that when viewed from the windows the park would seem to be a limitless and wholly private parkland.



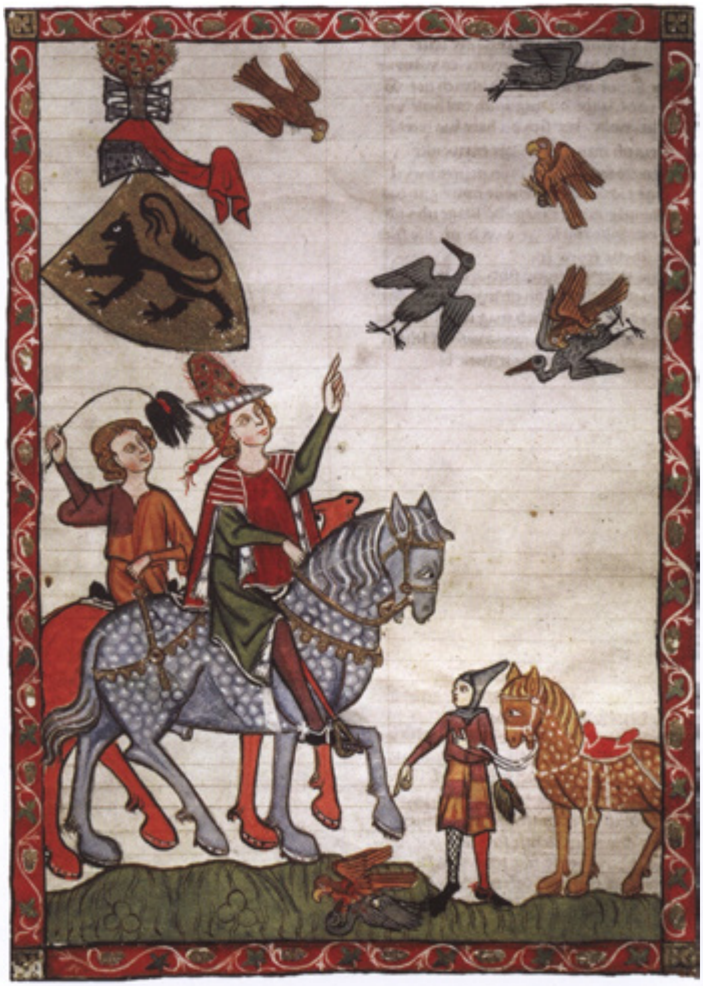
Hunting was a popular pastime for the nobility, and the hunting of the stag or hart was considered the most noble pursuit of all. Gaston Pheobus' *Livre de Chasse* laid out the entire ritual, from the first search to the final butchering. (The Art Archive)

FOREST, DEER PARKS AND HUNTING

Like the inclusion of crenellations, the creation of a deer park required a licence from the Crown. The ownership of hunting land or the right to hunt within it were as much a symbol of noble status as the fortified dwelling or heraldic arms. Vast tracts of land, by the late 12th century maybe as much as a third of southern England, were set aside for hunting. These parks and 'forests' (a legal term for a hunting ground rather than a place of dense woodland) came under their own 'forest law' the terms of which were designed to protect the animals and landscape for the sole purpose of hunting. Under this law it was illegal to hunt game, build enclosures or clear land for agriculture within the forest without a warrant, which was sold by the Crown. Those living within the forest were forbidden from owning hunting weapons or dogs.

Hunting was a noble pastime and, like the tournament, considered a manly pursuit and a training for war. The chivalric writers emphasized the importance of hunting as exercise for the body whilst in his treatise on hunting entitled *The Master of Game*, Edward of Norwich, Duke of York in the reign of Henry IV and V, writes that 'hunting causeth a man to eschew the seven deadly sins' and that he is 'better when riding; more just and more understanding, and more alert and more at ease'.

He also says that hunting gives a man 'better knowing of all countries and all passages'. Not only did hunting improve fitness and equestrian skills, it also taught the knight about the use of terrain. In many ways the hunt was like a military campaign. The hunt *par force*, 'by strength', began with the *quest*, the tracking of the quarry before the hunt began. Then the hunters would assemble to hear the huntsman's report and decide on a strategy for the hunt itself. The hounds, separated into packs, were placed along the expected route that the quarry would take, so that they formed a *relay* and no one pack

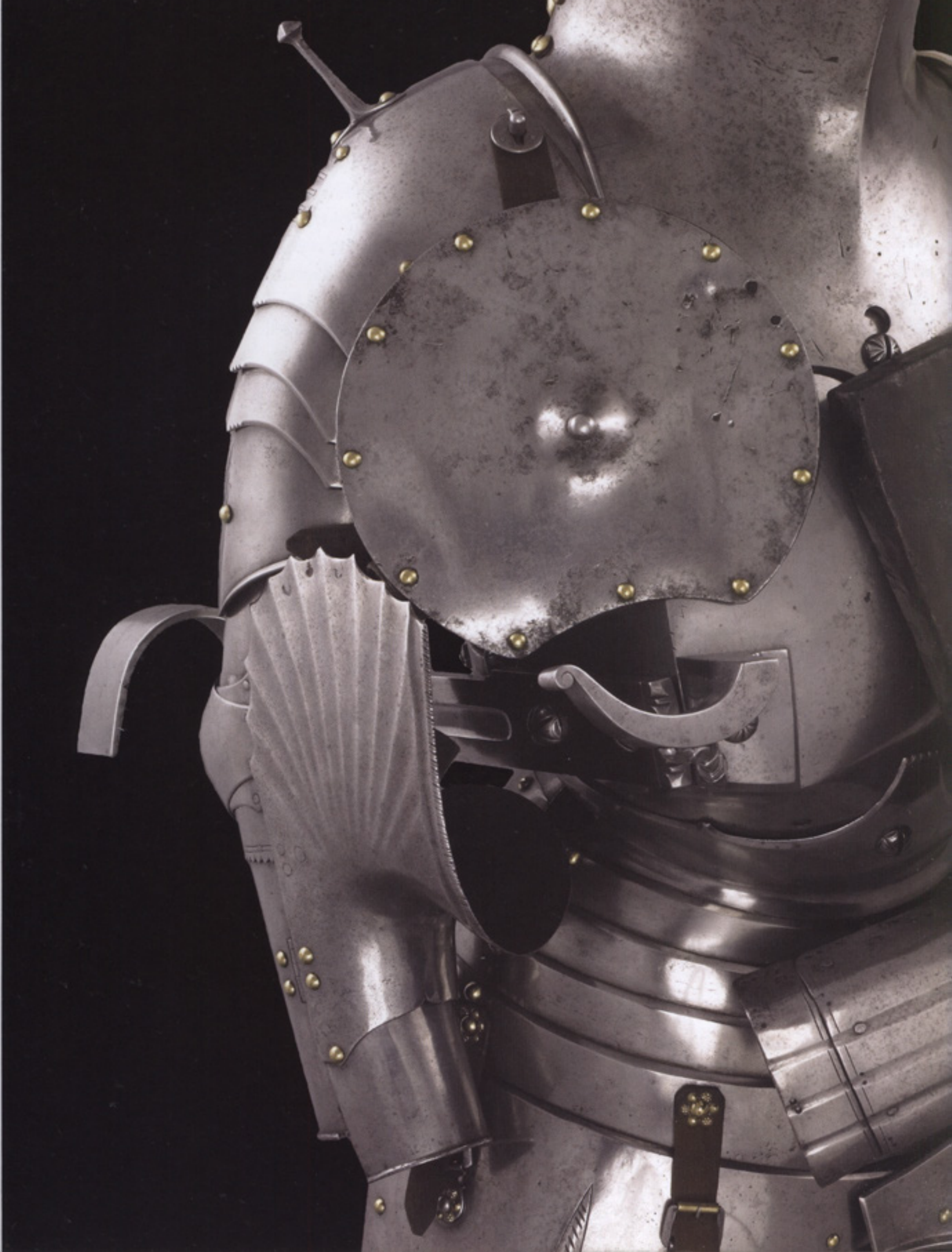


Falconry and hawking were as noble pursuits as hunting, although Gaston Pheobus rated it less because it could only be enjoyed during the spring and summer months whilst the chase could be pursued all year around. (The Art Archive) would become over-tired. The quarry was then tracked and chased. Finally, when the animal was unable to run further and turned 'at bay' the dogs were called off and one of the hunting party would be chosen to have the honour of going forward and making the kill with spear or sword, literally by the strength of his own hand, or *par force*. A slightly less prestigious form of hunting, 'by bow and stable', saw quarry being driven by beaters towards a fixed line of shooters armed with bows. In both cases there was a substantial element of planning and timing involved as well as an understanding of the quarry, the nature of horse and hounds and a not inconsiderable degree of physical prowess. Even at bay the stag and the boar, the two creatures most regularly hunted *par force*, were dangerous creatures, more than capable of maiming or killing a man. The English banneret Sir John Chandos lost an eye hunting stags and Richard, Duke of Bernay, the second son of William the Conqueror, was gored to death by a stag in the New Forest in 1081.

The hunting of the hart and hind, of the boar, bear and hare, and of the fox, badger and otter, was all done from horseback with dogs, or with the bow. The hunting of birds might also be done with the bow, using specially designed arrows with blunt or crescent-shaped heads (which would kill the bird without damaging the flesh), but the more noble pursuit of such game was with hawks. Unlike hounds, which were categorized practically from their role and use against particular prey, the hawk was considered noble itself, and a hierarchy of nobility attached to these birds. According to the 15th-century treatise on hawking in the *Boke of St Albans*, the rare and powerful gyrfalcon was suitable only for a king, the peregrine for a baron, the saker for a knight and the lanner for a squire. These falcons, known in the treatises as 'hawks of the tower' because they hunted from high altitude and stooped on their prey, were differentiated from the hawks proper, who hunted horizontally and close to the ground, and who were seen as the birds appropriate for the commoner, the yeoman, the priest and the cleric. Thus the falcon and hawk, as with the differences laid out in the sumptuary laws, were used to identify the status of the owner. In fact the use of each bird was seen as a different art; falconry was the higher and more noble, whilst hawking, particularly in later medieval France, might be seen as the pastime of the commoner.

Although both hawking and hunting were a means of providing meat for the table they were not particularly practical ways and the majority of game that went into the pots of the kitchens came from netting and trapping. However, just as in battle and tournament, there was prowess to be gained from the act of hunting, and especially from the slaying of a great creature such as a boar or a stag. Both hunting and falconry were group activities in which the entire noble household might take part. Falconry was actively participated in by both men and women, and both rode to the hunt. Even those not actively involved might be able to watch from purpose-built terraces. Like the tournament, hunting was part game, part training and part social ritual. The romances echo this sense of the hunt as a social occasion. *Erec and Enide* begins with King Arthur's desire to re-establish the tradition of the hunt for the White Stag as part of the celebrations of Easter, whilst in the three days' hunting of Lord Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at another festival, this time Christmas, it is the size of the retinue and the number of servants who accompany them that is emphasized. The tale of Gawain, like many others, focuses in great detail on the hunt itself, from the initial tracking to the ritualized butchery of the quarry. Just as in their treatment of battle and warfare, those writing tales for the ears of the nobility and knights chose their subjects carefully based on what their audience would want to focus upon. The hunt, like all the many other social and cultural aspects of the knight's life, was not a simple and practical matter, but intrinsically tied up with his desire and need to display his status.

Even off the battlefield that status was bound up with the knight's martial calling. Developing skill on the hunt was seen as developing skill for the battlefield, and prowess accrued in both. Even if it was first and foremost a place of comfort and ease, the knight's dwelling had to have the appearance of a fortress. The symbols that were developed to identify him on the battlefield spread and did the same in his home and in the chapels and churches he had built, and the gravitas and dignity of his political and judicial functions came from those warranted him by his chivalric ethos and the sword he carried into battle. Whilst not always dominant on the battlefield, nor always the social elite off it, the knight was a social and military force that dominated the middle ages. What is left to be asked is, where did he go?



CHAPTER SIX

THE DEATH OF KNIGHTHOOD?

FOR NEARLY HALF A MILLENNIUM THE KNIGHT WAS A DOMINANT force in warfare and society, his culture pervading almost every aspect of the medieval world. By 1600 that dominance had gone. The knight had vanished from the battlefield, whilst his social role was indistinguishable from many of the 'middling sort' who had not the same distinction. What had happened to cause this change, and where had the knight gone?

In social terms the disappearance of the knight has been connected to two interconnected factors; the blurring of the distinction between the knight and what English historians generally term 'the gentry', and the increasing separation of the idea of nobility from military service.

The non-knightly had always served in war, taking the role of what commentators of the 13th century called *equites classis secundae* –'second-class cavalry'. Although they were described by a variety of different terms, such as *serjans* (*serviens equitans* in Latin), *damoiseau* or *scutiferus* (*ecuyer* in French), they are all similar in form. It is generally agreed that they differed from the knights only in terms of their social rank and the expense and quality of their equipment, and that even the latter might not be all that different. By the latter half of the 14th century the distinction had all but disappeared and knight and squire could all be considered under the martial catch-all 'man-at-arms'. The English crown from Edward III onwards indented for no one but men-at-arms or archers; all other distinctions had disappeared.

In England, and to a certain extent elsewhere in Europe, the increased intensity of warfare and the greater demands for manpower offered opportunities for a greater number of this 'squire' class to play a role in war. The gentry became actively involved in war, and were vital in its success. The remarkable victories of Edward III's reign in particular, brought them financial rewards which they then invested in land. Just as the knight of the 12th century had acquired dignity and status through the profession of arms, so now the gentry started to demand the same. They had, after all, been taking the same risks on the same battlefields; why should they not also share in the status and privileges afforded those with the title of knight?

The squires began to adopt all of the trappings of knighthood and, in the same way that the knights' adoption of seals and their own individualized coats of arms had been opposed by the magnates in the 12th and early 13th centuries, those above them tried to restrict their behaviour. In a writ of 1417, produced as he readied for a campaign in France, Henry V instructed an inspection of all heraldic arms on the grounds that men had been adopting them without any formal grant or hereditary right to them. He instructed that:

> ... all, except those who bore arms with the king at Agincourt, shall on a certain day declare their arms and by what grant they have them, to the persons named or to be named for the purpose, under pain of exclusion from the expedition which is about to set out, loss of their wages, and the defacement of their said arms and tunics called '*cotearmures*'.

It is clear from this that whilst Henry had no problem with accepting the service of the gentry as men-at-arms, this did not immediately entitle them to the privilege of and symbols of noble rank. That, as the caveat exempting those who had fought beside the king at Agincourt proves, came from especially distinctive royal service.

In the 15th century, though, things were changing, particularly in England. Campaigns in France were longer and more extensive. The man-at-arms was no longer being contracted for a short, sharp *chévauchée* aimed at causing political and economic hardship to the French crown and offering him the opportunity for the spoils of raid and ransom. Instead the campaigns were about seizing and holding territory. Sieges were more frequent and service entailed signing up for extended periods, sometimes of years, as part of a garrison, with far less renown or financial reward. As a result the gentry were less willing to serve, and the captains were no longer seeking amongst their local affinity for men to join them on campaign. Instead they turned to a more professionalized soldiery, comprising men who spent a large proportion of their time on the continent, serving in the French garrisons.

A similar professionalization of the role of the knight took place in France. In 1445 the French established a permanent cavalry force of around 1,800 *lance*s, a unit comprising a fully armoured man-at-arms, or *gendarmes* supported by a more lightly equipped *coustillier* (literally 'knifeman'), a page and three archers (who would later become cavalry similar to the *coustillier*), a total of 9,000 combatants, since the page was not expected to fight. These units were not to be disbanded at the end of a campaign, nor used as garrison troops. Instead they were stationed across the different provinces of the realm, their upkeep maintained by its inhabitants both in kind and in cash. In common with the experience of the English at the same period, this type of service encouraged a different type of soldier and no longer did it serve as a formative experience for the knight and gentleman.

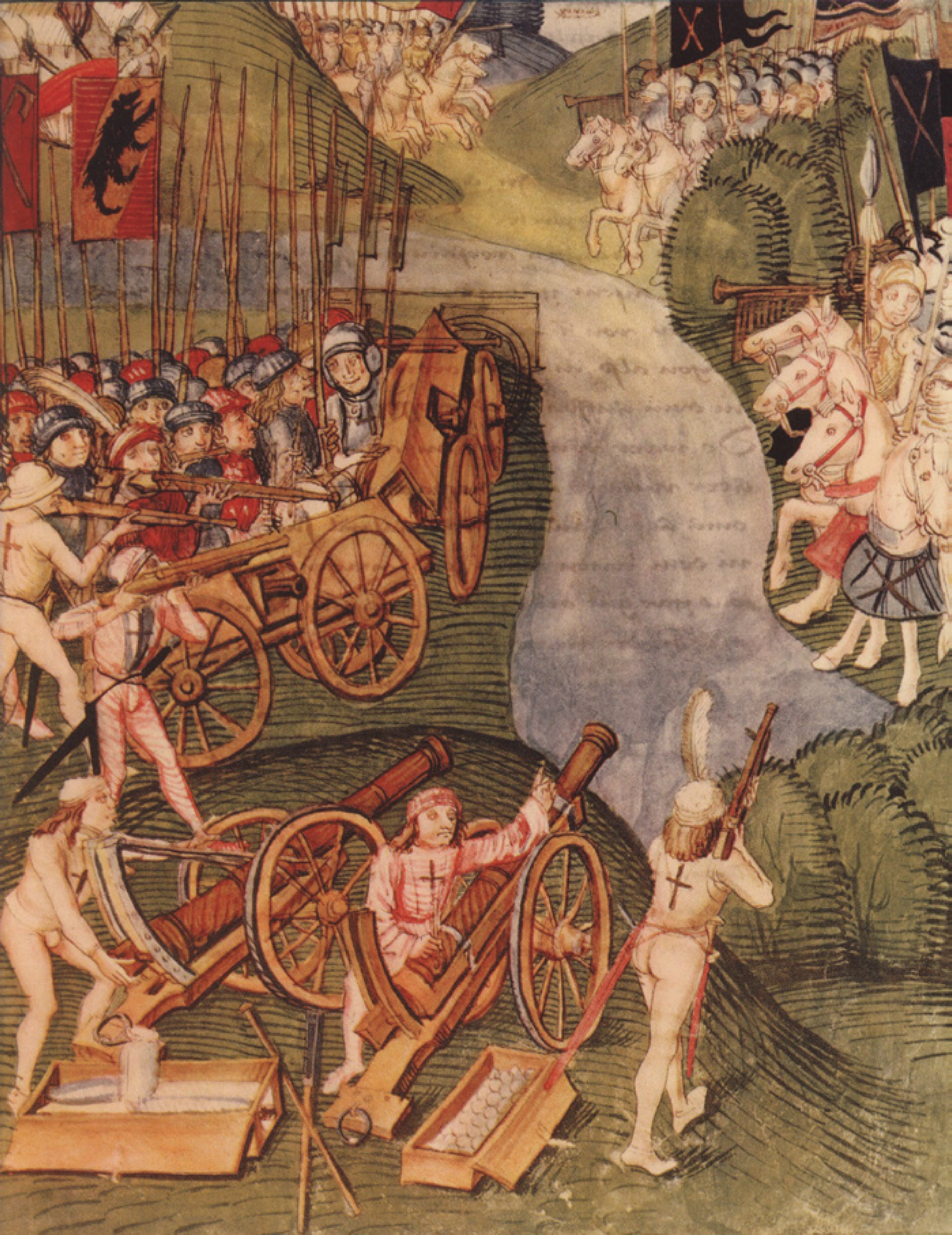
Nobility came from service, but increasingly that service was not military. As time went on, service within the domestic household of kings and aristocrats held a similar dignity to those who served as soldiers. The opportunities for learning, coupled with the increasing requirements of royal and local bureaucracy, led to a secularization of administration. Whereas before the majority of clerks would have come from an ecclesiastical background, now they were laity. Equally the complexity and extensive mechanism of local and national government meant that duties which had once been the preserve of the knight, service on juries and in commissions, were opened up to those of lesser stock. Men of gentry rank, who once would have been considered too lacking in honour for the role and, a generation or so earlier, would have been donning the harness of a man-at-arms, now put on the robes of the clerk and lawyer and in doing so acquired noble status. In France this showed itself in the distinction between the *noblesse de l'épée*, the 'nobility of the sword' who attained their rank through military service, and the *noblesse de robe*, those whose nobility came from service in administrative and legal office. By the 16th century, then, nobility and the status that one might have once termed 'knightly' might come from legal, administrative or domestic service – all duties once shared by the knight. Military service was no longer an essential qualification.

As we discussed in the Introduction, however, the social status of the knight is only one way of defining him. The main interest in this book has been in the knight on the battlefield. What happened to him here?

For many the 14th century witnessed the end of the knight as a military figure. Talking of a 'military revolution' it is argued that in this period the balance shifted firmly in favour of the infantry. Pointing to battles such as Courtrai, Bannockburn, Crécy and Poiters, and the 15th-century victories of the Swiss over Charles the Bold's Burgundian *Ordnnance* army at Grandson and Morat, they argue that the quality of infantry had now improved so far that it was no longer cowed by the charge of the knight. Standing firm behind a wall of pike or using weight of fire from missile weapons, and in particular the longbow, the common infantryman was now able to hold his own against the knight. It might be argued that by the end of the 15th century, the fully armoured cavalryman was, if not wholly supplanted, then more or less defunct.

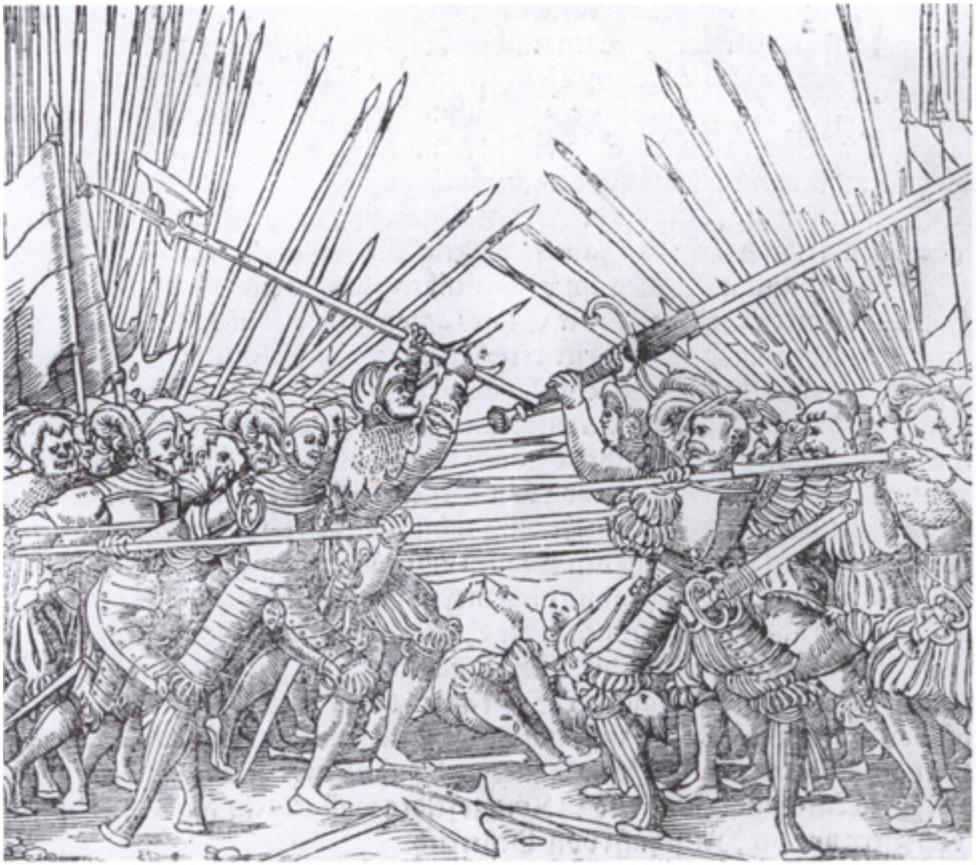
The knight was far from irrelevant at this period, and to suggest his demise here is somewhat premature. Whilst a battle which saw the foot well prepared and in sound defensive positions might indeed defeat the mounted knight, particularly if, as at Courtrai and Bannockburn, he showed impatience and rashness, if the infantry was caught unprepared, failed to stand firm or, worse still, went on the offensive then it could be routed. The Flemings at Roosebeke in 1382 and the English at Castillon in 1453 both suffered defeat while attacking their French foes. The great 'longbow' victories of the Hundred Years War were matched by a greater number of occasions where the longbow was not able to stop the French cavalry. At Pontvallain in 1370 and at Patay in 1429 French knights were able to catch the English ill prepared and break them. Similarly the Lombard cavalry serving with the French at Verneuil, five years

Opposite: In spite of his impressive artillery train, standing army and complex battle strategy, Charles the Bold of Burgundy found that he could not counter the élan and ferocity of the Swiss pikemen, being defeated twice, at Grandson and Morat. (The Art Archive)



before Patay, were able to break the archers of Bedford's right flank, aided by the quality of their armour, the heaviest in Europe at the time. English tactics were never solely about archers. At Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt, the archery slowed and disordered the French advances but did not stop them. The engagements were all decided at hand-strokes by the men-at-arms of both sides. Much rested on the steadfastness and skill of the knight even here.

It was the developments of the 16th century that truly saw the end of the dominance of the fully armoured man-at-arms, on horse or on foot. This was due to the real increase in the number of infantry in armies that took place at the end of the 15th century. The establishment in France of the *francs-archers* in 1448, an elect militia force of pike, archers, crossbows and, later, handgunners, organized at parish level, saw infantry being put on the same permanent establishment as the *Ordnance* lances. Their poor showing at the battle of Guinegate against the Burgundians in 1479, however, led Louis XI to disband them and rely instead upon another standing force: Swiss mercenaries, who were fast becoming the foremost soldiery in Europe.



By the time the *Landsknecht* came to dominate the battlefield in the middle of the 16th century, the pike was considered the queen of the battlefield, and the heavy horseman relegated to the sidelines. (Bridgeman Art Library)

It was the Swiss, with their combination of pike, halberd and firepower, at first the crossbow but very quickly handguns, who became the template for the organization of armies in Western Europe throughout the last decade of the 15th and first quarter of the 16th centuries, although it would be the *Landsknechte* from southern Germany – the German mercenary pikeman initially considered the poor man's Swiss warrior – who would come to be the dominant force. The 16th-century battlefield was dominated by massive blocks of pikemen, 3,000 to 4,000 strong, who launched themselves at each other with great fury. There was little that the companies of *gendarmes*, a tenth of the size, could do against such behemoths.

Gunpowder weaponry put the final nail in the coffin. By the middle of the 15th century gunpowder artillery had already reduced the length of sieges from months to weeks and even days, and traditional medieval fortification was more or less obsolete. The new fortifications that grew up in their stead, with thick, low and mathematically angled walls, slowed the process of the siege back down again, lengthening campaigns and leaving the expensive-to-maintain *gendarmes* with little to do. The 16th-century campaigns in Italy and the Low Countries with their emphasis on siege reduced the perceived need for men in full armour and heavy horses.

Cannon were also finding their way onto the battlefield. There had been artillery at Crécy and at Agincourt, but their effects seem to have been negligible. Substantial numbers of artillery pieces were included in Charles the Bold's *Ordnance* armies but, again, at both Grandson and Morat there was little opportunity to use these slow-firing weapons against the swift advance of the Swiss.

It was not the cannon but the handgun that impacted most heavily on the knight. These were far more powerful than either the crossbow or longbow and, with the development of the musket in the 1570s, it was impossible to produce armour thick enough to stop them. Under the protection of the pikemen, behind fortifications or, as at Pavia, under the cover of woods and broken ground, they were able to kill the knight with relative ease. The 15th-century *condottiere* Paolo Vitelli would have captured gunners mutilated and blinded, 'because he held it unworthy that a gallant, and it might be noble knight, should be wounded and laid low by a common, despicable footsoldier'. It did not stop him from employing such men in his own forces, however. Practical as ever, the nobleman adopted and adapted.

With foot combat dominated by the pikeman and handgunner, and the lance-armed charge futile in the face of their firepower and sheer mass, the *gendarmes* began to eschew the lance for the pistol and cavalry became a mobile gun platform, utilizing the infantry's own firepower against it. Such tactics required mobility and the amount of armour, unnecessarily heavy and cumbersome for the protection it offered, was reduced to a helmet, back- and breastplate, cuisses and vambraces. Full armour was retained

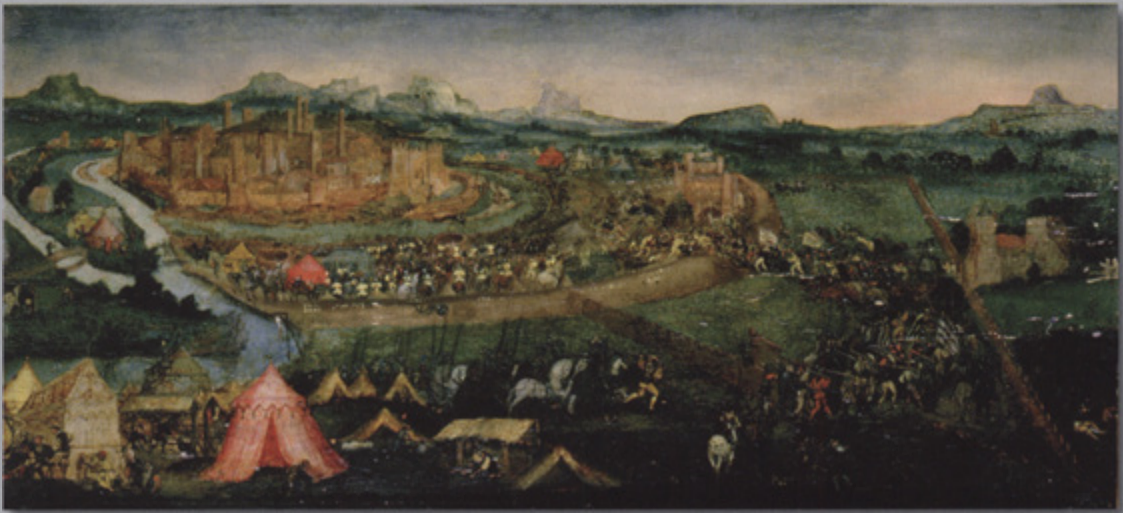
THE LAST CHARGE OF THE *GENDARMES*: PAVIA

The struggles between the Italian city-states that had proven a lucrative venture for so many northern European knights in the 14th century rumbled on. At the beginning of the 16th century they had become the cockpit for the conflict between the Hapsburg rulers of Spain, Burgundy and the Holy Roman Empire and the Valois kings of France. At Pavia these great superpowers fought their final cataclysmic battle, one that would see the end of the armoured horseman's dominance of the battlefield.

By November 1524 the French army of François I had invested the Hapsburg-held city of Pavia and, after two failed assaults settled in to starve them out. Hapsburg forces in the region made various attempts to relieve pressure on the city but it was not until January 1525 that fresh reinforcements, in the form of 15,000 *Landsknechte* – German mercenary footsoldiers – under the veteran commander Georg Frundsberg allowed Charles de Lannoy, the general in command of the Imperial forces, to renew the offensive. After capturing the French outpost at the Castel Sant'Angelo that lay between the two armies, the Imperialists were able to close on Pavia and prepare to attempt its relief.

The main part of the French besieging army was encamped within the walled Visconti Park north of the city with further forces closer to the city walls, spread to the south, west and east. Lannoy's army arrived to the east of the city, establishing artillery batteries that enabled them to fire into the French encampments. On 24 February Lannoy launched an attack through a breach in the park wall with the aim of raiding the Mirabello Castle, a fortified hunting lodge that he believed to be the French headquarters, and of getting supplies through to the city's beleaguered garrison.

The attack started just before dawn in a thick mist, and visibility for much of the battle was less than a hundred yards. The raiding force and various elements of the French army, alerted to some kind of enemy activity, blundered into each other, and the battle commenced as a series of disconnected and random skirmishes. As the morning wore on, more and more troops became embroiled and finally, at 7.30am, François himself, fully armoured and leading 900 lances, about 4,500 heavily armoured horsemen, entered the fray. They routed a force of Spanish *gendarmes*, about two-thirds their number and more lightly equipped than their French counterparts, pursuing them towards woodland. The accompanying Imperial infantry scattered for the trees and François believed he had won the battle. However the infantry now turned and their arquebusiers, using the cover of the woods to protect them from any attempt to charge, pinned the *gendarmes* in place whilst further footsoldiers were brought up onto the cavalry's flank. François and his knights found themselves trapped, pinned against the woods and decimated by the arquebusiers' fire. Unable to manoeuvre they were slaughtered by the Spanish and German foot, honour demanding that the *gendarmes* disdain to flee. François himself was dragged from his horse and only the timely arrival of the Imperial commander Lannoy, who pulled him from the *mêlée* and escorted him from the field, prevented his being killed. As was fitting, the king had been surrounded by a great number of the French nobility, and many of these were killed or captured; not since Agincourt had they suffered so great a loss from amongst their ranks.



An attempt to depict the whole battle of Pavia in a single painting. The artist gives us a better view than any of the combatants, who fought in a thick mist that left them blind to the rest of the battle. (Bridgeman Art Library)

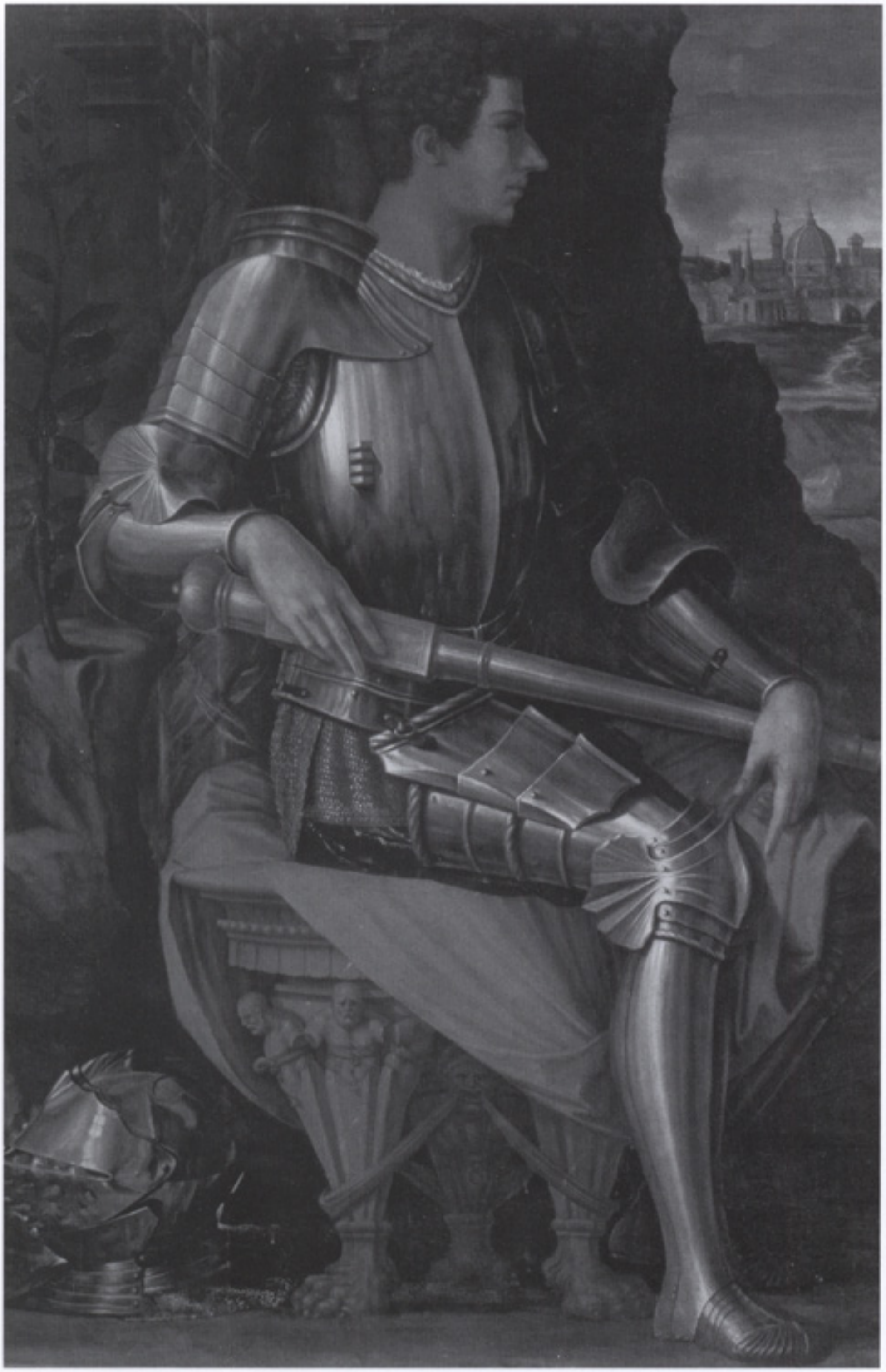
Pavia was a decisive battle in many ways. Not only did the fully armoured horseman cease to dominate the battlefields of Europe, but French dominance of Europe was also brought to an end. With François in the Emperor's hands the political balance swung firmly in favour of the Hapsburgs. The 6,000 Swiss mercenaries serving the French broke under the attack of the German *Landsknechte* and fled the field, losing half their strength. Never again would they be seen as the superior military force in Europe. It is perhaps ironic that the very men who had done so much to end the dominance of the fully armoured man-at-arms with their victories over the Burgundians at Grandson and Morat half a century before now also found their reputation destroyed on the same field.

only for the tournament and pageant, where the armourer himself could fully express his artistry and skill with parade pieces as breath-taking as they were impractical.

Breath-taking and impractical might be how some would describe the chivalry of the 14th century. It might be suggested that chivalry was a blindfold which prevented the knight from seeing the oncoming strike of the Flemings' *goedendag* or the Italians' arquebus. It might be argued that by the time Edward III was installing the first of his Garter knights it had become nothing more than a meaningless shell, a façade behind which the bloody business of professional soldiering continued. But whilst the demands of honour and prowess might lead a knight to make foolish errors, this had always been the case – think of the Count of Artois at Mansourah (see p.133) – and the individuals had always been condemned for doing so. War had always been a hard-headed business, and the knight ever the realist. This did not make the code by which he lived any less real to him, or its tenets less worthy of pursuit.

A fine example of this comes from Sir Thomas Gray of Heton's history, the *Scalacronica*. A knight called Walter Marmion arrived at the border castle of Norham, which was under the captaincy of Gray's father, carrying a helmet with a golden wing as a crest. This helmet had been given him by his lady with the instruction that 'he go to the most perilous place in Great Britain, and that he make the helm famous'. A sizeable force of Scots nobles arrived outside of the castle four days after Marmion's arrival. The latter equipped himself, 'all gleaming with gold and silver, so equipped that it was a marvel, with the helm on his head', ready to engage the foe. Gray told him, 'Sir knight, you have come here as a knight errant, to make that helm famous, and it is more fitting that chivalric deeds should be done on horseback than on foot, whenever this can suitably be done', urging him on into the fray, promising to rescue his body, dead or alive. Marmion rode out and engaged the Scots, who managed to wound him in the face and drag him from his horse. At this point Gray emerged on foot with the rest of the garrison and drove the Scots off, rescuing the questing knight.

The story is often held up as a singular image of knightly chivalry. The challenge given by Marmion's lady is reminiscent of Ulrich von Lichtenstein's *Frauendienst* or one of the Arthurian romances. But it is the way in which Gray responds to it that is most interesting. It makes the point clearly that even a practical warrior, as Gray undoubtedly was, recognized the importance of chivalry to the warrior on the battlefield. Both Gray and Marmion were warriors of long service, and there is no suggestion in the account that Gray thought Marmion to be a fool or tried in any way to dissuade him from his task, nor that Marmion was that fool, lacking self-control or good sense. Both men saw the challenge of Marmion's lady as being an acceptable and fitting one for a knight to undertake, acceptable even on the no-nonsense battlefields of the Scottish border. That Gray brought the garrison out



Vasari's portrait of Alessandro de Medici, completed in 1534, encapsulates the Renaissance nobleman's attitude to war. He looks back, dressed in Maximilian plate armour, but also forward, for cradled in his lap he has a gun barrel. (Bridgeman Art Library)

ARDUA PETO

on foot to rescue Marmion reinforces the conjunction of practicality and chivalry in the knight's approach to war.

The trappings and ceremonies of chivalry did, however, become more remote from the reality of war during the late 14th and 15th centuries. Tournaments were no longer training for war. Whilst they might still help to keep a man fit and healthy and active, their increasing specialization and the changes in the methods of battle meant that the joust was no longer relevant to the knight's behaviour on the field. Heraldry also became less important. The increasing size of armies made it much more important to show collective identity through national symbols, such as the cross of St George worn by all English royal expeditions from Agincourt onwards. Displaying one's identity and status was less likely to save your life. War had become more sanguinary, not just because there were far more infantry, men uninterested in trying to extract ransom from noble families. The Wars of the Roses showed a dramatic change in temperament from what had gone before. Captured noblemen were executed without a murmur of protest, personal vendettas and revenge for past murders leading to yet more noble blood being spilt. Ironically it was now a cry of 'spare the commons' that was most likely to be heard across the field, from men whose grandfathers would not have thought them worthy of a moment's notice.

By the 16th century the changes wrought on the battlefield meant that the notion of chivalry of the 13th century, the fusion of the warrior, courtier and Christian, had all but disappeared. The crusading zeal and the idea of the Christian knight had vanished for the most part, although not entirely, buried by the victory of the Ottomans at Nicopolis in 1396. As the aristocratic warrior elite transformed itself into a professional officer class the drives for individual martial glory were downplayed, whilst that of honourable conduct, duty and loyalty took centre stage. The concepts of courtliness and fine manners were claimed by the gentry who asserted a nobility gained through service. They became something quaint and foolish. They were lampooned by the likes of Cervantes, whose Don Quixote, having read too much medieval romance, imagines himself the questing hero performing deeds for his lady, but is thought by all around him to be foolish and mad.

By the end of the 16th century the knight as we have been looking at him had become a thing of the past. His social dominance had been subsumed within the gentry of courtiers, functionaries and landowners, his traditional battlefield role had disappeared beneath a forest of pikes and cloud of gun-smoke. He has never been forgotten. All around us, in the arms and armour displayed in museums, in the funeral monuments and coats of arms in countless churches and cathedrals, in the manuscript illuminations and the stories and tales of great battles and heroic deeds, the colour and pageantry of the world of the warrior still exerts its fascination.

Opposite: Gradually armour became less about protection and more about display, as this piece of 16th-century parade armour demonstrates. (Bridgeman Art Library)

GLOSSARY

aketon	a form of padded coat, worn on its own or under armour
arrêt de la cuirasse	a bracket fastened to the breastplate that allowed the knight to rest his lance to get a steadier aim and truer strike
aventail	a curtain of mail attached to a helmet, covering the neck and shoulders
banneret	a knight who led other knights under a banner, a rallying point, also a mark of social distinction
béhourd	an informal and *ad hoc mêlée* generally fought with blunt weapons
bevor	a shaped defence of plate that protected the neck and face from collarbone to chin
camera	the private rooms of a nobleman in his castle
chausses	clothing for the legs, but also used to describe mail leggings
chevalier	French word for a knight
collée	the blow received by an aspirant knight in some knighting rituals
condottieri	Italian term for mercenary companies, named after the contract or *condotta* by which they were employed, raised from the 13th century through into the Renaissance
conrois or *constabularii*	small units of knights, somewhere between ten and 50 strong
constable	title for an officer within a lord's *domus*, responsible for the stables and horses, and for the commander of a castle or town garrison. Also one of the two ranks (along with marshal) within a medieval army in charge of its discipline (perhaps with the specific role for quartering troops)
couter	plate cap that protected the elbow joint
cuir bouilli	hardened leather, used in the making of armour
cuisse	armour to protect the thigh
destrier	the knight's 'great horse' or warhorse
devises	the informal system of badges that was used alongside hereditary and systematic heraldic arms
domus	a noble's civilian household
eschielles	small units of knights, similar to *conrois* or *constabularii*
familia	the knight's military household

Fechtbuch (pl. *Fechtbücher*)	literally 'fight book'; a German term for manuals on medieval combat techniques
fin amors	courtly love
gambeson	a padded coat, similar to an *aketon*, but worn over armour rather than under it
gardbrace	a plate covering the left shoulder, reinforcing the *pauldron*
gendarme	literally 'man at arms', a late medieval term for a knight
gentry	English term for a social group, incorporating the *squire*, below that of the knight but above the free peasant
goedendag	a stout club bound at its head with an iron band and a steel pin projecting from the end (also referred to as the *gepinde staf*)
hauberk	a sleeved mail shirt reaching the wearer's knees and, occasionally, a coif that protected the wearer's head
hobelar	a mid-14th-century English term for a form of 'second-class' cavalry, similar to a sergeant
knighting	also known as 'dubbing' or 'belting', the ritual by which a man was accepted into the closed elite of knights
lance	as well as describing a weapon, this term referred to a small unit of knights
man-at-arms	catch-all term for those of all social ranks who served in war in the manner of a knight including, from around the 14th century, the knight himself
marshal	a military title. In the military orders the marshal was in command of the Order on the field. In other armies the marshal, along with the constable, had a role in its organization and discipline
mêlée	the *mêlée* was a free-form tourney in which teams of knights fought *en masse*. It had little to distinguish it from battles except the presence of an audience
miles (pl. *milites*)	literally 'soldier', a Latin term for a knight
Minnesänger	German poets, often knights, who wrote *Minnesang*, songs and lyrics on the theme of courtly love, but also about the political events of their day
ministeriales	German knights who in many ways shared the status of serfs
ordo (pl. *ordines*)	order, most often used to describe a divison of society, but also in the context of orders of knighthood (e.g. Order of the Garter, Order of the Star etc)
pas d'armes	organized challenges often fought during lulls in military campaigns

pell	a man-high stake driven into the ground, used for training in weapon handling
poleyn	armour protecting the knee
quintain	at its simplest, a target on a post, or in its more complex form a swivelling arm with the target on one end and a weight on the other, the quintain was used for training in mounted combat
rerebrace	armour protecting the upper arm
routiers	unemployed soldiers seeking to maintain themselves in the peace between the campaigns of the Hundred Years War
sallet	a lightweight helmet of the late middle ages, protecting the head. Often combined with a *bevor*, protecting the chin and neck
solar	the main chamber of a lord's private rooms within his castle; a withdrawing room where the lord, his family and honoured guests might retire away from the communal and public area of the great hall
spaulder	plate cap that protected the shoulder
squire	literally 'shield bearer'; a title originally given to the servant of a knight, occasionally a knight in training. Over time it developed a social context, becoming synonymous with gentry
tirones	young, unmarried knights (also known as bachelors or *juvenes*)
trebuchet	a siege engine, using a counterweight or men hauling on ropes to catapult rocks or other missiles
tournament à plaisance / à l'outrance	a distinction between a combat fought for entertainment ('for pleasure') and that fought with the intent to capture, wound or kill an opponent ('to the utmost')
vambrace	armour protecting the lower arm
ventail	a flap of mail attached to the coif to protect the lower half of the face

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‘In the midst of martial conflict it is a soldier’s duty, clad in his helmet, to thirst for blood, to concentrate on killing, to plead his case with his sword alone, to show himself in all his actions an unyielding warrior, displaying a ferocity more than ordinarily brutal. But by the same token, when the turmoil of battle is over and he has laid aside his arms, ferocity too should be laid aside, a humane code of behaviour should be once more adopted...’

Gerald of Wales

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